

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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DIVIDED BRITAIN



A DEMOCRACY FOR THE RICH

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In the midst of the longest recession since the 1930s, the Tory Party has been returned to power for an almost unprecedented fourth term. With 41.9 per cent of the vote, it secured an overall majority of 21 seats. In contrast, the Labour Party with only 34.4 per cent, suffered a devastating blow. With the changes that have taken place in the British working class, the Labour Party has failed to build a new social base sufficient to win it parliamentary office.

Why Labour failed

The most widespread view advanced by bourgeois commentators is that Britain has become a conservative nation. Unlike the period of 1945-1951 the average family today owns its own home, often owns shares and its standard of living has more than doubled. Thus 'despite the recession, most people now feel that they are on the right side of the tracks.' (John Grigg, *The Times*, 11 April 1992). So they preferred the Conservative Party promising economic recovery with further tax cuts, to a Labour Party proposing economic recovery with modest tax rises to finance modest increases in public spending.

Another view, this time from the Labour Left, and one which will doubtless be echoed by their Trotskyist admirers, was put succinctly by Dennis Skinner. Stating that he was tired of listening to the SDP and Liberal Democrats 'about how we should collaborate and accept their policies', he argued 'it is time we represented our class. We don't need the Liberals and proportional representation to do that. What we need is a bit of class politics.' (*The Independent*, 11 April 1992)

Both these positions lack substance. It is impossible to discuss politics in Britain without stating from the outset that Britain is a major imperialist power now rapidly declining, and that this is decisive in determining economic and political developments. The reconstruction of British capitalism after World War Two – the establishment of the Welfare State, the creation of nationalised industries and a gradual rise in the standard of living – was dependent on the industrial and financial superprofits sucked out of the British empire. This created an electoral base for the Labour Party drawn from among the traditional manufacturing working class, workers in the nationalised industries and the growing public sector. The latter included middle class white-collar workers.

This underlay the post-war social democratic consensus which made Labour an electable government. However this consensus was undermined by the failure to arrest Britain's relative industrial decline in the 1960s and 1970s. Matters came to a head with the Callaghan government of 1976-79. The public sector cuts of 1976-78, the wage cuts masquerading as incomes policies and the consequent Winter of Discontent of 1978-9 represented a watershed in Labour's electoral fortunes. The social democratic consensus had truly broken down.

With Thatcherism, the ruling class adopted a new strategy to halt Britain's economic decline and to sustain its position as a major imperialist power. It was an attempt to revitalise British industry by cuts in public spending, attacks on working class living standards and wholesale privatisation. Yet despite £100bn revenues from North Sea

Oil, the large superprofits from investments abroad and the massive transfer of wealth to the private sector, Britain's industrial decline accelerated. The British economy now became ever more dependent on its parasitical earnings from North Sea Oil, overseas investments and other financial services.

By the end of the 1980s, a combination of falling revenues from North Sea oil and the growing challenge to Britain's international financial position from German and Japanese imperialism destroyed Thatcher's economic strategy. British imperialism has now entered a period of irreversible economic decline. This is highlighted by the decline in Britain's net overseas assets from a peak in 1986 of £103.6bn to £29.6bn in 1990, less than the £32bn in 1981. Net receipts from portfolio investment abroad in the first half of 1991 were in deficit for the first time since 1980.

Where Thatcher did succeed was in drastically changing the social and political character of the British working class. Employment, housing and share ownership indicate the extent of the changes that have taken place. Manufacturing employment fell from 7,113,000 in 1979 to 4,693,000 in 1991. Through privatisation and rationalisation, employment in public sector corporations fell from 2.1 million in 1979 to 800,000 in 1990. Other public sector employment remained static at just short of 5.5 million. In contrast service sector employment as a whole increased from 13,580,000 to 15,868,000 in the same period. Employment in banking, finance and insurance increased from 1,647,000 to 2,734,000 in 1990, nearly half the increase in the services sector employment. The numbers of self-employed rose from 1,842,000 to 3,222,000. During the Thatcher years trade union membership fell from over 12 million to just over 8 million.

Owner-occupation increased from 53 per cent in 1979 to nearly 67 per cent in 1991 – 15.7 mil-

lion people now own their own homes. Council housing stock fell from 6.5 million to about 5 million as more than a million tenants exercised their right to buy. The number of outstanding mortgages, 6.2 million in 1980 rose 40 per cent to 9.8 million in 1991. In 1990, one in four of the adult population were shareholders compared with one in thirteen in 1981, with 14 per cent of adults owning shares in privatised companies. Through privatisation, home ownership and so-called 'people's capitalism', Thatcher has destroyed the old social base for the Labour Party and given a substantial section of the working and lower middle class a material stake in the system.

Parallel to this process, the gap between rich and poor significantly widened. The real income of the poorest 20 per cent of the population fell from £3,442 per annum to £3,282 between 1979 and 1989. That of the top 20 per cent increased from £20,136 to £28,124 – a widening of the rich-poor gap by an additional £8,146. Income tax cuts worth nearly £29bn were made between 1979 and 1991, the main beneficiaries being the rich, the middle class and the better paid workers. In 1979 there were 7.8 million workers earning less than the Council of Europe's decency threshold. Today the figure is 10 million – 47% of all employees. The gap between the highest and lowest paid male manual workers is greater than in Victorian times. 10.3 million people including 2.6 million children live in

poverty. By 1987 more than a third of the UK population were living in poverty or on its margins, up 50 per cent on 1979. Changes in the social security system were key factors in this rise.

Historically Labour has represented the more privileged layers of the working class – the traditional labour aristocracy – and sections of the middle class working in the public sector. But the social changes highlighted above have significantly reduced this political base, and moved it rightwards. Because these layers are decisive in determining the outcome of elections, Labour has to recover their support, which it has lost since 1979. To achieve this, it has accepted privatisation, council house sales, limits on trade union rights, increased police powers, nuclear weapons, and has become a 'fair tax' party for the well paid. On the other hand, it cannot guarantee the votes of state sector workers, the low paid, pensioners and the unemployed without a commitment to increase state expenditure. In a period of rapid economic decline, this necessarily involves increasing taxation, since any other option would lead to a public sector deficit unacceptable to the City with a consequent run on the pound, which Labour is committed to defend. Such taxation would, however, inevitably hit those sections of the middle class whose votes it must recover to win the election. Hence its insoluble dilemma.

This highlights the wishful

thinking of Ken Livingstone when he argues that 'We must be able to build socialism without taxing middle income families till it hurts. . . . In London and the South East, £21,000 is average earnings and should not have been a target for higher tax. I have always argued that the target should have been £26,000.' (*Evening Standard* 10 April 1992) This is little more than a transparent defence of middle class living standards when millions of workers are struggling on the poverty line. To improve the conditions of these workers would require taxing the rich and the better paid far more than any Labour government would be prepared to contemplate.

Voting with their wallets

The election campaign was a media event, a sham, a spectacle which excluded the vast majority of people. All that needed to be determined was whether the impact of growing unemployment and mortgage repossession would outweigh the effect of Labour's tax increases on the strata which determines the outcome of elections and which deserted Labour in 1979. The election results showed that too many of these continued to vote with their wallets.

Labour, while regaining a certain measure of support among skilled workers – 43 per cent in 1992 compared with 36 per cent in 1987, was well below the 49 per cent which enabled it to scrape home in the 1974 election. Among the high paid professionals the Tory vote did not change and Labour gains were at the expense of the Liberal Democrats. Among trade unionists Labour increased their votes but again at the expense of the Liberal Democrats. Among working class home owners Labour also gained but only to the extent of reducing the Tory lead from 12 to 2 per cent. In the South, the Midlands and the North Labour's gains were all once more to the detriment of the Liberal Democrats. In Scotland the Tories even increased their

vote while Labour and the Liberal Democrats lost to the SNP. For Labour to have won either they or the Liberal Democrats, or indeed both, would have had to take significant votes from the Tories. This could not happen given both parties were proposing tax increases to finance state spending. The better off did indeed vote with their wallets.

Britain: a conservative nation?

What kind of a nation is it where the better off working class and middle class are not prepared to consider tax increases to finance any alleviation of poverty? It is an imperialist nation where high working class living standards are based on super-profits extracted by the brutal exploitation of the working class and oppressed peoples of the Third World. The Labour Party was the child of imperialism and reflects its parasitism politically. It was formed in order to defend the interests of privileged layers of the working class – an alliance of the labour aristocracy and sections of the middle class. For this reason throughout its history it has uncompromisingly defended imperialism and the ruling class – from its earliest days right up to the 1984/85 miners' strike and the Gulf War.

The basis for the British peoples' 'conservatism' is the fact that British prosperity whenever it has existed has been based on the parasitic plunder of the oppressed nations of the world. The organised working class movement in this country has been thoroughly corrupted through the experience of Labour imperialism. It is precisely for this reason that since the formation of the Labour Party no mass movement has developed which expresses the interest of the working class as a whole and which is capable of mounting a sustained challenge to imperialism and capitalism.

Skinner's argument for Labour Party 'class politics' is as flawed and disingenuous as those of bourgeois commentators talking glibly of a 'conservative nation'. The Labour Party does, and always has, expressed 'class politics' – that of the strata it was formed to represent, an alliance of the labour aristocracy and sections of the middle class. Skinner's call is yet another apology for Labour imperialism and a reprehensible pretence that this parasitic alliance can be remoulded to defend the interests of the working class as a whole.

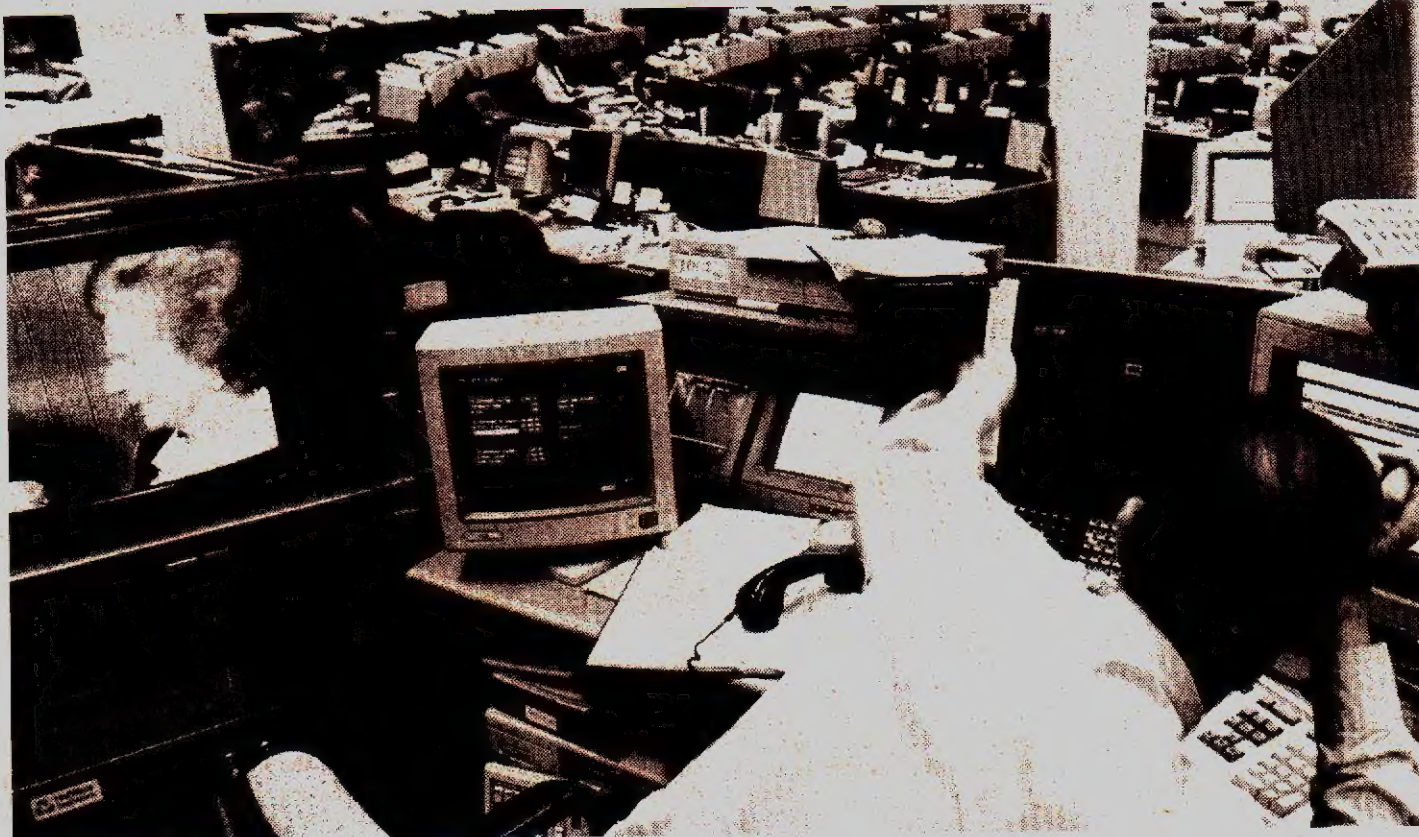
Building a new movement

The 1992 Election demonstrated yet again that there can be no working class movement in Britain without a fundamental break from Labourism and the fraud of parliamentary politics. The working class facing another five years of Tory government will have to take into its own hands the defence of its living standards, its communities, its schools and its hospitals. Class politics means a return to mass participation on the streets, on the housing estates, in the workplace. It means building a movement in Britain against racism and fascism and in defence of democratic rights. It means supporting the Irish peoples' struggle for self-determination. It means building mass working class opposition to future Gulf Wars and imperialism's 'New World Order'. In short it means breaking with imperialism and its Labour defenders and uniting with the working class and oppressed throughout the world. ■

election '92

EDITORIAL

A conservative nation?



COMMUNIST FORUM

David Reed, editor of FRFI, will address the question:

AFTER THE ELECTION WHAT NOW FOR THE WORKING CLASS?

As the crisis of British imperialism deepens, the re-elected Conservative Party will mount unprecedented attacks on the working class. The Labour Party will not oppose them.

Sunday 26 April, 2.30pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1
(nearest tube: Holborn)

The spectacle

Napoleon once remarked that he would give three regiments for a newspaper. Balzac said 'I don't like journalism. I could even go so far as to say that I hate it, but it is a force, the most powerful of this century.' TREVOR RAYNE and JOHN ARMSTRONG examine the role of the media in the election.

A century on from Napoleon, Lenin observed:

'In the era of printing and parliamentarism it is impossible to gain the following of the masses without a widely ramified, systematically managed, well-equipped system of flattery, lies, fraud, juggling with fashionable and popular catchwords and promising all manner of reforms and blessings to workers right and left - as long as they renounce the struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie.'

The media purports to inform and educate the public about political issues. British politicians act as if they accept this assumption. In a 'liberal democracy' the media present themselves as watchdogs of the state and hence as independent of it.

However, the state, of which the elected government is only one part, is the biggest single source of information in society. The state monopolises economic and social data, information

on overseas developments, the police, the military and its global deployment, political spying etc. Almost all such information is collected, processed, controlled and selectively communicated by the state. Figures on homelessness, levels of income, what British police and troops are doing in Latin America... it is hard to find out, except from the state and consequently its censors.

To this must be added the increasing privatisation of information. From the closures of libraries to subscriber-only data bases of the giant bankers and industrial corporations, access to information is being restricted and sold at a price.

The media construct a forum for debate about political issues. Yet the media are industries, capitalist industries seeking profits. In 1988 50.7 per cent of national newspaper revenue came from advertising income. Companies that advertise have financial sanction over media content. Total advertising expenditure in 1988 was £6bn;



The media became obsessed with picture-taking - even of themselves

terest and agenda of big business monopoly capital.

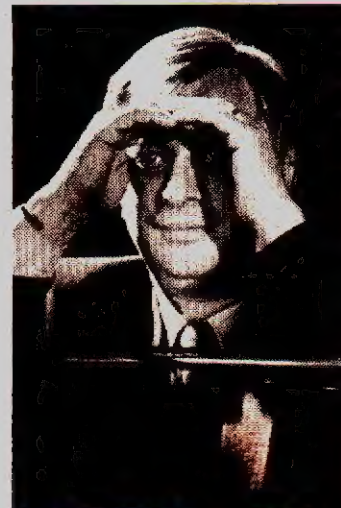
At the same time the needs of the media as a technical process and as an entertainment industry have remoulded the political process into their own recognisable and saleable image.

In our FRFI Special Election Issue we pointed out that in 1950 40 per cent of voters went to political meetings, 50 per cent were canvassed; in 1987 3 per cent went to political meetings and 20 per cent were canvassed. Hugo Young (*The Guardian*, 25 March), in an article entitled 'Politics without people', recounts his experiences of political meetings in 1992:

'Our process has become, as never before, quarantined. Communications are swifter and more spacious than ever but they move in one direction, from top to bottom. From the people there is an organised silence... the Labour Party could not direct me to a single public meeting being addressed by a shadow cabinet member in London this week or next.'

Young describes a Conservative meeting in Hampstead, organised in great secrecy with a specially selected audience. A 'set' was shipped in; a table with flooring attached, a blue-grey backdrop etc, for a meeting of just 70 invited guests. What is the inspiration for this? - film sets, shop window dressing. Electoral sets have cost up to £500,000.

The process is tailored to the technology, the lighting, the cameras. Political meetings



Chris Patten looks for a new future

Comings & Goings No. 3

An old soldier

Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil), leader of the LibDems came and went. Closet Tory, and surely a prospective Conservative leader were he more humble, he claimed to be outright victor in the election campaign more often than any other party leader. Public school educated and ex-captain of Marines, he stayed true to his privileged origins. Offered not only to build Tridents, but also to be Admiral of the Fleet.

turned into conference halls, full of Communications' Directors. Labour's rosé and pastel grey setting resembled the cosmetics department at Harrods, where the subdued light effect turns the most blotched skin into peaches and cream. The television and radio news production teams scanned through the 'one-liners', the 'sound bites', anything that could fit on a T-shirt, that were on offer from the day's campaign; 'juggling with fashionable and popular catchwords'. The selections are then assembled into the programme news schedule. That's entertainment!

Politics shifts from being about issues, parties, problems, to being about leaders, personalities and the spectacle. The vast majority of the people are cast in the role of audience, spectators, onlookers in a supposedly democratic process; like the colonised, awaiting their fate, gazing on to see which of their masters will occupy the mansion.

Politics comes to resemble the 'soap opera'. Perhaps that is the democratic content of the spectacle; that it must appeal to a mass audience. Just like soap opera it borrows heavily from advertising techniques and employs its personnel. The voices are 'trained', manufactured, and the looks and hands are rehearsed. Politicians must be entertaining, 'upbeat', not gloomy or earnest. The whole effect must be light and optimistic, not too serious nor cautionary and uncertain.

So the political debate is tailored to suit the media's own image, and the politicians never challenge it. In a beautiful, telling irony, a metaphor for the whole electoral performance, there was a moment in the battle

of 'Jennifer's ear'. Narcissus, we are told, fell in love with his own image, but took it to be the image of someone else. So lost to reality was he that the one he talked about and dwelt upon so attentively was none other than himself. At one moment the media, freed from the illusion of the politicians, conducted the campaign among themselves: journalists interviewed journalists and the cameras followed. At last, it was if the media themselves were running for election. 'The fool who persists in his folly will grow wise.' (William Blake)

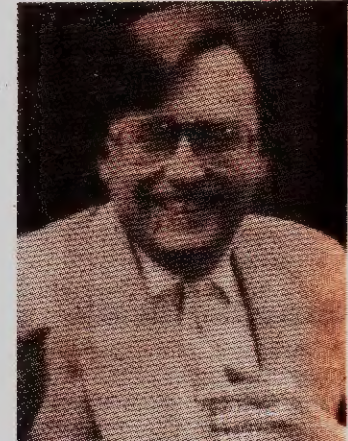
Let's be clear: in this democracy Britain has the most censored 'political media' in Europe. The day after the election, Sinn Féin and its MP Gerry Adams will be banned once again. There is no Freedom of Information Act. Access is restricted to the 'officially approved' parties. Intruders are as likely to be called 'thugs', arrested and charged. On top of this the media self-censors: *Panorama* removes 'Sliding into slump', Walden's programme on devolution is dropped and so on.

Each day the media set the agenda and the telegenic personalities enter stage right to be made or broken by the media. What kind of society is it where political posters, advertising hoardings are unveiled like newly-acquired Great Masters or sculptures and all for the sake of a photo-opportunity? The world of the 'spin-doctor', the 'make-up man', the 'image-consultant' - the very words express deceit, 'flattery, lies and fraud.'

Comings & Goings No. 4

The Ministry of Fun

The tone of the next five years was set by the appointment of David Mellor to the Ministry of Fun. Following the pattern of other Ministries: Health (Bottomley) = no NHS; Education (J Patten) = no state schools; Social Security (Lilley) = no benefits; Employment (Sheppard) etc; David Mellor's job will be to ensure that we get none. These appointments may have a logic; the appoint-



David Mellor: new minister for fun

ment of Kenneth Clarke as Home Secretary has none. Fresh from destroying Health and Education, Clarke has been let loose on what is left of Britain. With Waldegrave head of Citizens Charters we can expect them to be privatised by the Daily Express. Tarzan himself has achieved his ambition as king of the jungle at the DTI. Rifkind, curiously, becomes Minister of Defence: perhaps his term as Lecturer in Politics at the University of Rhodesia under Ian Smith's UDI will serve him well if Scotland declares war on Westminster.

GONE: Kenneth Baker turned down what must be the second ranking ultimate insult for departing Tory Cabinet Ministers - Welsh Secretary. Himself a dangerous dog and Thatcher loyalist he retired to the backbenches with a snarl. Also gone: Waddington. King, Brooke. Chris Patten is half-gone and Chalker is now a Peer-ess.



Comings & Goings No. 1

A very 'nice' man!

John Major (Huntingdon) proved at least one popular myth about the British - we prefer underdogs. John rose from the bottom of the heap as the son of a gnome manufacturer in Surrey. *Hard Times* forced the Majors to Brixton - where John was caught on camera buying kippers for a meagre tv-supper during the election campaign. Imbued with an affinity for his fellow citizens and rejected as a bus conductor by the London Transport Establishment, John joined the Conservative Party pledged to fight 'Class'. A meteoric political career took him from humble Executive of Standard Chartered Bank to even humbler MP for Huntingdon. As Minister of State for the DHSS and in a succession of other lowly under-paid Cabinet posts like Foreign Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer, John's policy decisions like removing income support from 16-17 years olds and forcing them into homelessness, doubling VAT, making the economy 'hurt' and supporting the Poll Tax, all endeared him to his people. In his most recent campaign he was forced to electioneer from a home-made soap box and be nice to Norman Lamont and Kenneth Baker, while the Leader of the Opposition (of whom more later) swanned around in a private jet. Egg-bespattered he emerged victorious and even more humble - a very 'nice' man, still pledged to the annihilation of 'Class' - the working class that is.

Gerry Adams loses West Belfast seat

In a set-back for the Republican Movement Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams lost the seat he has held in West Belfast since 1983 to SDLP candidate Dr Joe Hendron. However, the size of the vote for Adams did not fall, and it seems that Hendron only won through an alliance with loyalists who voted for him in order to oust Gerry Adams. With nationalists like the SDLP, who needs loyalists?

Elsewhere in Belfast, though the SDLP increased its share of the vote, the bedrock of Republicanism has remained strong. Sinn Féin won more than 23,000 votes in the city, its share falling only 0.7 per cent from 1987. This despite the broadcasting ban on Sinn Féin which was lifted for just three weeks before the election. Once the election was over, it was back in place: on the Thursday, Gerry Adams could be seen and heard on television; by the Friday, he could not. Support has also remained in the face of intimidation from the British army. Under the auspices of protecting the electoral process, a couple of hundred extra troops were sent in to the Six Counties. Increased patrols, house raids and beatings in nationalist areas were reported throughout the election campaign.

Sarah Bond

Comings & Goings No. 2

Not a very 'nice' man!

The only thing to distinguish Neil Kinnock (Islwyn) from a long line of Labour traitors was that he once claimed left pretensions and turned against his origins with more supreme viciousness even than his predecessors. Famed as a 'leftie' MP in his youth, he was once renowned for keeping his seat during the Queen's Speech. In later years as Party Leader he would grovel to anyone or anything if it would further his ambition to be Prime Minister. He systematically and ruthlessly destroyed the Left in the Labour Party including dropping any last vestige of principle from his own personal affiliations. He changed from a unilateralist to a warmonger to match his blood-stained predecessors. He led a thoroughly Loyal Opposition to support the Tories on Ireland, in the Gulf War, on privatisation. He betrayed the miners' strike with spite and failed to lead any opposition to the Poll Tax. By 1992 Labour Party policies were virtually indistinguishable from the Tories. The 1992 campaign was streamlined and presidential. The image was touched-up, from hypocritical head to treacherous toe. No eggs were thrown because no real voters were allowed near. King for a Day, but the voters got him in the end.



16.2 per cent went to the national press, almost double this amount to television. Without such money, there would be no such media.

Media companies are run by big business monopolies. Share ownership is interwoven with those of the banks, insurance companies, fund management groups and industrial combines. *The Guardian* is tied to Norwich Union Life Insurance and Barclays Bank in its ownership of Anglia Television. The *Financial Times* is linked with Standard Life, the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Pearson Group, major shareowner of Shell. Central TV combines with DC Thomson and the Prudential, LWT with the Pearl etc. Therefore the media have their own interest and agenda: the in-

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CRISIS
IN PERU

No intervention in Libya

The electoral circus – as ever – forced international issues to the margin of British politics, but a recently formed campaign to oppose sanctions and possible military action against Libya aims to change all that. No intervention in Libya (NIL!) explain their objectives.

Despite all the talk of a New World Order from the leader of the world's last superpower, it is business as usual where the Third World is concerned. The massive destructive war against Iraq was conducted under a cloak of legality imparted by the United Nations. This, of course, is the reality of the New World Order – the UN reduced to an instrument of US foreign policy by the compliance of the Security Council.

Now the same dubious legality is being used to justify sanctions, and possible military action, against Libya.

Last year, the British and US governments issued orders for the arrest of two men they claimed were Libyan intelligence operatives, for their role in allegedly helping to bomb Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988. Rejecting all offers of compromise or mediation from Libya itself, the Arab League and the Conference of Islamic States, Britain and the US have demanded the unconditional handover of the two 'suspects'. Needless to say they have already been charged, tried and convicted, not just by the media, but by senior government offi-

cials on both sides of the Atlantic.

Libya has asked the International Court of Justice in the Hague to arbitrate the dispute, in line with the Montreal Convention – an international treaty dealing with airline piracy – to which all three countries are signatories. In a thinly-veiled attempt to pre-empt the judgement, the US and Britain have enforced mandatory sanctions against Libya, effectively usurping from the Security Council the role of both legislator and judge in international law.

The choice of 15 April as the deadline for the imposition of these sanctions is significant – it is the anniversary of the bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi by British-based US F111 warplanes in 1986, which killed over 100 people. The imposition of sanctions on this day amounts to a declaration of psychological war against the Libyan people, since the sanctions themselves will be largely symbolic.

The real agenda of the US is twofold. On the one hand, emanating most probably from the State Department, is the awareness that – with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the em-

bargo against Iraq – Libya is not the only independent source of oil. It is a particularly significant supplier to Italy and Germany. Indeed Libyan oil accounts for nearly half of those two countries' consumption.

On the other hand, the Pentagon is coming under increasing pressure to justify its massively swollen budget, at a time when the US government is in a fiscal crisis of almost unimaginable proportions. In response to tough questions about the US military's role in a 'post-Cold War environment', the Pentagon has produced a list of seven nations that supposedly constitute 'Regional or Emergent Strategic Threats'. Needless to say, Libya is on the list. Despite the fact that its military was unable to defeat even the armies of a small country like Chad, Libya is supposed to pose a threat to the security of the world's greatest superpower.

NIL! works with anti-imperialists inside and outside the Labour Party, with peace activists and religious leaders from the Christian and Islamic faiths, and with representatives of the families of the Lockerbie bombing towards the following objectives:

1. An international, neutral investigation into the Lockerbie bombing, and a fair trial for the two accused outside



Victims of the 1986 US bombing

- Britain and the US;
2. The lifting of the sanctions against Libya, the withdrawal of threats of further economic or military action, and a just and peaceful resolution to the dispute;
3. A public inquiry in Britain into the bombing of PA 103 in order to reveal the truth

about the investigation, and so that improvements to airline security can be identified and implemented without further delay.

More information from: NIL!, BM Box 4615, London WC1N 3XX.

Far-right gains in European elections

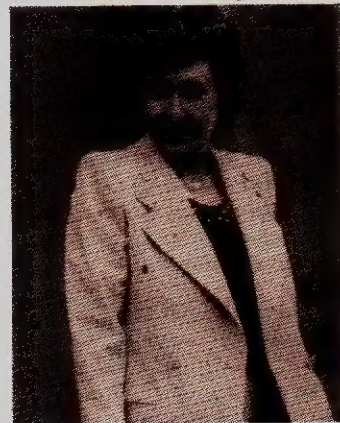
CAT WIENER

The recent regional elections in France and Germany, and the general election in Italy reflect a sinister trend in European politics. Increasing economic integration in Europe has encouraged racism and nationalism and, in France and Germany, raised fears about economic domination by more powerful neighbours. Germany needs to assert itself as the rising star of European imperialism. Coupled with the unemployment and falling living standards that mark the current economic crisis, this has made the crude and racist nationalism of the far-right an attractive prospect to an increasing number of voters.

All three elections reflected a disillusionment in the ability of the mainstream parties to resolve the crisis. With the left discredited and in disarray, the voters' search for more radical solutions has resulted in an inexorable rise in electoral support for the fascists.

In France, the ruling Socialist Party was rejected by four fifths of voters, polling a dismal 18 per cent. Recent government scandals, unemployment levels of 10 per cent and rising, and increasing hostility towards immigrants (encouraged by all the main parties) contributed to the 14 per cent vote for the fascist Front National, the anti-immigration party *par excellence*. The two environmental parties

were also beneficiaries, polling about 15 per cent, but are so deeply divided that their success is likely to be transient. The discredited Communist Party, which has lost supporters in droves directly to the fascists over the last four years, polled 8 per cent. Unless the left is able to unite to capitalise on the large numbers it has attracted to anti-racist and anti-fascist marches and rallies, and break definitely with the Socialist Party to offer a



French Socialist ex-Prime Minister Edith Cresson: brought in racist policies but still lost votes to the fascists.

real alternative, there will be nothing to stem the rising fascist tide.

In Italy, where basic services are amongst the worst in Europe and public spending so high that the national debt is now larger than a full year's GNP, the separatist Northern League, which blames Italy's economic problems on the 'shiftless South' ('We pay! Rome collects!')

The south wastes!) and immigration, has increased its following. In the industrial heartland of Milan, it is now the largest party. High-profile fascist candidates like Mussolini's granddaughter Alexandra have made myths of a golden fascist past respectable in Italian politics. The ruling Christian Democrat vote slumped to 27.3 per cent, the Socialists polled only 13.6 per cent, and the former Communists, now being wooed into an alliance with the right-wing Christian Democrats, 17 per cent. Whatever coalition emerges, racist attacks on immigrants will continue as the various fascist organisations consolidate their support.

Regional elections in two key areas in Germany reflected growing levels of support for fascist solutions to deal with the immigrants who are being scapegoated by all the main parties in the economic crisis; support which takes the form of brutal racist attacks on immigrant hostels and anti-immigrant graffiti. Both the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats lost support to the far right Republicaners, with the fascist German People's Union extending its share of the vote.

In Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, the pattern is repeated. The need for a movement which offers a real anti-racist, anti-fascist alternative to the working class throughout Europe has never been more urgent. Without it, the future looks grim indeed. ■

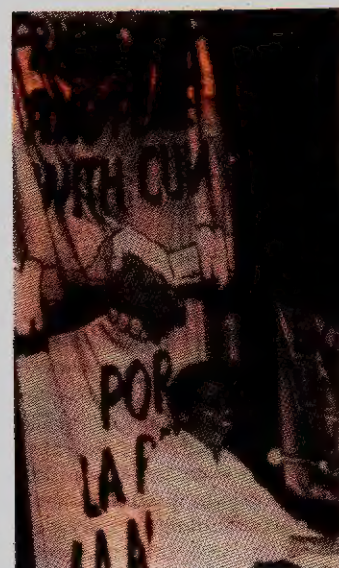
Hands off Cuba!

On 15 March, at a packed and lively public meeting in Conway Hall, the Revolutionary Communist Group launched its material aid campaign in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution. At the meeting, called under the slogan 'Hands off Cuba!', RCG member Cat Wiener, recently returned from Cuba, bore testimony to the courage and commitment of the Cuban people in building and defending the gains of socialism in spite of the dire economic hardship imposed by the US blockade.

A vitriolic diatribe by members of the Spartacist League against Cuba, prompted a heated political debate and renewed commitment by the majority of the audience to participate in the RCG's 'Week of Action' for Cuba. During that week, RCG comrades and supporters collected soap, medical goods and powdered milk outside shops and shopping centres as part of the material aid campaign. In May we will be continuing with the campaign – call us on 071 837 1688 if you would like to get involved.

Material aid campaign grows worldwide

In many countries the material aid campaign to send urgently needed goods to Cuba has taken off: a boat carrying grain and powdered milk has set off from Australia; the Cuba Si! movement in Germany has sent medicine and 140 tons of powdered milk; in Galicia, Spain, the mayor has announced a campaign to collect medicines, teaching materials, children's food and other types of aid to



Cuba; in Mexico the Vapor Cuba campaign is planning to send a second shipload of oil. At the same time rallies in defence of the right of the Cuban people to choose their own destiny, and against the US blockade have taken place in Italy, Spain, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and many other countries.

It is essential that the movement here in Britain plays its part in the international defence of the Cuban Revolution. Following its 'Boat for Cuba' initiative, the Britain Cuba Resource Centre will be taking up material aid as part of its campaign for 1992. We urge all FRFI readers to support the campaign.

FRFI readers can support the Cuban economy by buying Cuban Havana Club rum and Hatuey beer, which is available (wholesale) from: Cinco Dias & co, 144 Bermondsey Street, London SE1 3TQ tel 071 403 0701; (retail) from Gerry's Wines & Spirits Ltd, Old Compton St, W1V.

Exporting death

A leaked memorandum from Chief Economist of the World Bank, Lawrence Summers, proposing the transfer of polluting industries to the oppressed nations has led to international demands for his resignation led by the ecology group Greenpeace.

The memorandum affirmed that the cost of unhealthy pollution should be measured by the earnings lost through greater illness and mortality. To Summers' mean little capitalist mind, it therefore added up to 'impeccable logic' to transfer the most polluting productive processes to the countries with the lowest incomes. Such countries had the added benefit of a high infant mortality rate – so few people were likely to live long enough to get cancer of the prostate, one of the many unpleasant risks carried by some of Summers' polluting agents. Impeccable logic indeed – the callous logic of imperialism, where the health and well-being of the industrialised nations will be preserved, as ever, at the cost of the untold suffering and slow poisoning of the oppressed. ■

News

IRISH TRIAL IN GERMANY

A recent statement received by *FRFI* from Irish prisoner Gerry McGeough, currently on trial in Germany, explains his situation:

"This concerns the recent decision by the (German) High Court in Zweibrücken to 'grant' a US request for my extradition in order to stand trial in New York on charges stemming from a 1982 arrest warrant, relating to my alleged involvement in arms procurement for the Irish liberation cause.

'... the request was "allowed" despite the fact that the Americans, in their application, submitted the wrong name, wrong place of birth and even wrong nationality! ...'

'No amount of repression or intrigue from the British, or those who serve them, can postpone the day of Irish liberation. All tribute meanwhile, is due to those in Germany who have shown sympathy and steadfast solidarity for and towards the Irish struggle.'

Pam Robinson

IRA CONTINUES DEFIANCE

The IRA defiantly stuck two fingers up at the British ballot box when it detonated two enormous bombs in the heart of London the day after the general election. The explosions reverberated around the capital – and the political and financial implications will continue to shake the British ruling class for some time.

The first explosion hit at the heart of British finance capital – the City. The bomb was planted in a transit van, and weighed around 100lb – the largest ever planted in Britain. It left a twelve foot crater, and reports say the damage runs into millions of pounds. Photographs showed streets strewn with broken glass and shreds of paper from offices all around the area. The blast brought to an abrupt end the revels of stockbrokers and bond dealers: many had stayed late in the area celebrating the return of another Tory government. According to reports, a 30 minute warning was given which included a description of the vehicle holding the bomb. However the police failed to respond rapidly and the area was not cleared: three people were killed and many others injured.

The second explosion some hours later severely damaged Staples Road in the North Circular, one of the most important routes into London. There is talk that the whole structure may have to be rebuilt, and the disruption to traffic coming to and from the capital in the next few months can only be imagined.

The explosions were a sharp reminder to the British state that for some of those it governs, politics is about more than mortgage repayments and tax bills. None of the political parties seeking election to the British Parliament raised as a serious issue the basic

democratic demands of the national community in Ireland. Home Secretary Kenneth Baker was right when he said that the blasts were an act of defiance. They will occur as long as Britain is in occupation of Ireland.

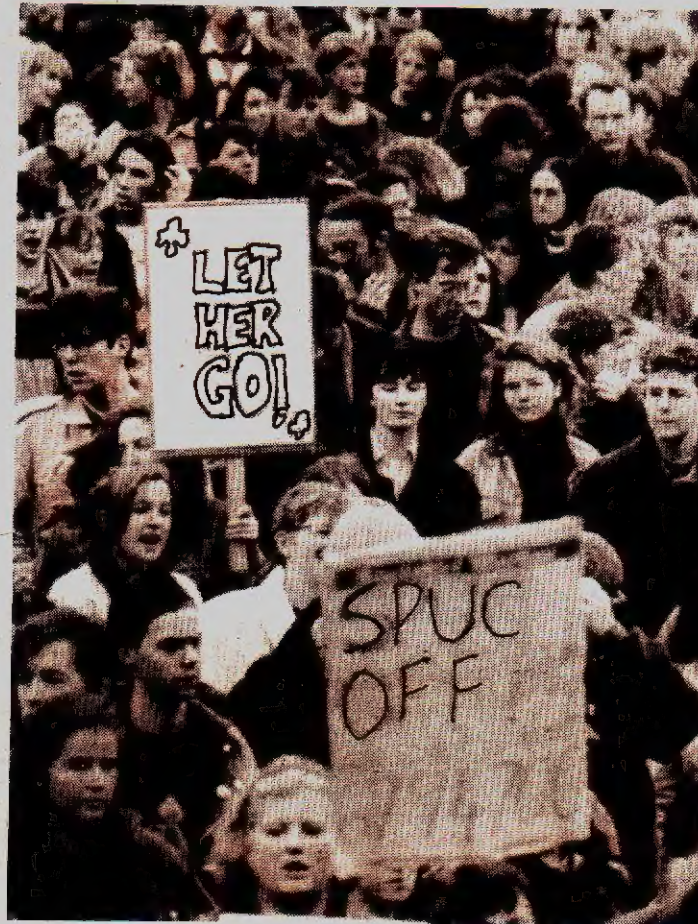
Sarah Bond

A second chance for a woman's right to choose in Ireland

MAIRE O'SHEA

As a result of a mass upsurge of sympathy for a 14-year-old rape victim, the whole question of Irish abortion legislation has moved to centre stage in Irish politics and could still prove to be crucial to the result of the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in June. Since the incorporation of Article 40.3.3 forbidding the introduction of legal abortion in any circumstances, except in the case of risk to the life of the mother, into the Constitution by a two-thirds majority at referendum in 1983, any campaign to amend or rescind the 1861 British legislation against abortion was impossible. Though thousands of Irish women travelled to England for abortions, the demand for information and counselling rights came only from the Well Women Clinic, a small group of radical students who suffered crushing defeats in the courts.

Then, in February 1992, massive media coverage was given to the case of a 14-year-old girl in Dublin, pregnant as a result of rape. Her parents took her to England for an abortion, but made the mistake of asking the Dublin police whether they should bring back foetal tissue for use in the prosecution of the rapist. The police reported this to the Attorney General, who issued an injunction recalling the family to Ireland, under threat of prosecution. The parents brought the girl back and appealed the injunction in the High Court. By then the girl was suicidal, according to the reports of a psychiatrist and a psychologist. The judge found that the risk to the life of the girl depended on her own decision and was not due to the pregnan-



cy. He upheld the injunction.

The response, from broad sections of people, including many who had voted for the Eighth Amendment in 1983, was one of horror and indignation. A hastily-organised picket of the Attorney General's office attracted over 700 people. They marched on the Dail (Parliament) and lobbied TDs. The following weekend 10,000, an enormous number for Dublin, were on the streets demonstrating. At campaign meetings two different strategies were proposed, one of demanding a widening of the exceptions to the total ban on abortion, to include rape and the mental health of the mother; in order to retain the support of the

broad sections, and the other of demanding the right to choose, which could be expected to marginalise us and prevent our capitalising on sympathy for the 14-year-old and achieving limited progress.

The Supreme Court invalidated the injunction, confirmed the constitutional right to travel and abrogated the right of this jurisdiction to criminalise actions in another country which are legal there. It also upheld the legality of abortion in cases where the mental health of the mother was at risk. The judgment was interpreted as allowing abortion in this country in certain very limited cases. It gave the opportunity to sup-

porters of Information on Abortion to propose that, if abortion were to be allowed in any circumstances, information and counselling must also be allowed. Indeed, if non-directive counselling were allowed in Ireland before travelling to England, in some cases this might lead to a decision against abortion.

The horror of the rape case is now fading; street demonstrations are considerably smaller and the brave voices in the ruling Fianna Fail Party calling for legal abortion in Ireland in restricted cases are silenced. The knives of the hysterical Pro-Life and SPUC groups are out, with displays of horrific pictures of dismembered fetuses and violent attacks on abortion campaigners on the streets. Fianna Fail have been faced with a dilemma – in 1983 they used the constitutional amendment to gain votes on a conservative Catholic nationalist ticket. Catholic nationalism has run its course and the corrupt, sectarian, populist Fianna Fail is now unstable. It has decided to call a new constitutional referendum which pro-abortion campaigners were calling for but of which the main aim is undoubtedly to prevent the June referendum on the Maastricht treaty being decided, and possibly voted down, solely on the question of abortion. The new referendum will be on the right of Irish women to travel abroad for abortions and to receive information and advice at home. A third referendum may yet be called on the wider question of availability of abortion in Ireland itself.

It is vital that the pressure is kept up and that women in Europe and internationally organise in support of their Irish sisters to defeat these antiquated, anti-woman laws. ■

A CONCESSION TO IRELAND OR KINNOCK?

'It is more important to make a concession to the Irish than to Gladstone'. Marx's lesson has not been learnt by the Socialist Worker's Party. The same *Socialist Worker* which urged its supporters to vote for modern-day Gladstone Neil Kinnock and his Labour party throughout the Election has carried two features attacking the Republican Movement and their current campaign. Why? Not because the SWP thinks it unnecessary to end British occupation of the Six Counties, but because the Republican Movement goes about it in the wrong way.

Their bombing campaign has 'nothing to say to Protestant workers about the every-day problems they face' (SW 22/2); nor can it 'counter ignorance' among the British population (SW 7/3). The SWP does not question why opposition to British rule does not win support from Protestant workers. Or indeed why 'ignorance' can prevail amongst the British population whose government terrorises and murders its opponents in Ireland. The answer however is there in their own coverage, which quotes a government report from the late 1980s that the average weekly income of a Protestant family is £235 compared to £198 for Catholics. The loyalty of Protestant workers to the British state is bought in Belfast just as British workers are bought in Basildon. The 'unity between Catholics and Protestants' for which the SWP call in the fight against that state is as likely as Neil Kinnock being a socialist – or even Prime Minister.

The Republican Movement knows that the best contribution it can make to unity in the north of Ireland is to destroy the sectarian state which creates division. Unfortunately it cannot expect the support of British socialists like the SWP.

Sarah Bond

Brutal attack on women POWs

PAM ROBINSON

On 2 March, women prisoners in Maghaberry Gaol were given a bitter taste of Britain's contempt for the rights of Irish women, as all but one woman in the gaol, including 21 republican prisoners, were brutally stripsearched in one of the worst incidents of its kind in recent years.

During a search in three blocks of the gaol, the women were informed that if they did not strip they would be subject to loss of remission and solitary confinement. They refused.

Women POWs from Maghaberry describe the attack that followed:

'What happened over the next 10 hours can only be described as sexual, physical and psychological torture. Gangs of screws in riot gear armed with batons and shields entered the wings. A gang of up to 16 entered each cell... The POWs were seized

and dragged to the floor, their faces pushed into the floor so they could not see their assailants and their mouths covered to stifle the screams. The screws removed each woman's clothes until she was naked. Every other woman in the gaol could hear each attack as it happened. Each woman spent the entire day listening to comrades being sexually abused before and after their own turn.'

An *Phoblacht/Republican News* reports that one of the prisoners was sat on by four riot-clad male prison wardens, who held her down, subjecting her to verbal abuse, while one of them ran his hands over her body.

'The feeling of tension and anger in the gaol is impossible to describe. The Board of Visitors were in the gaol on that day. One member of this supposedly impartial watchdog body stood and watched women being stripped naked. We regard their presence

as participation and their silence as consent. They are no longer welcome in this gaol.'

All twenty-one women who resisted the sexual assault on that day sustained injuries. One woman was temporarily hospitalised with facial bruising. Others are awaiting results of tests to determine the extent of their injuries.

'What is incalculable is the psychological scars. Women must now spend years in the same cells which were violated with such vigour. The NIO want to terrorise women prisoners, to beat us into submission because we continue to defy their attempts to impose their will on us.

'It is only one disgusting and deplorable part of an overall policy to try to control women prisoners; the Governor at Maghaberry has already attempted to deny the women association and allow a severe deterioration in visiting con-

ditions and increasing censorship of literature and letters... the latest step in the process is the attempt to dehumanise us by invading the most private parts of our bodies and inflicting physical and mental pain.'

In an unreserved condemnation of the forcible stripsearching of women prisoners, the Women's Department of Sinn Féin stated: 'This... has nothing whatsoever to do with security but is merely an attempt to break the will of women who will not surrender their political beliefs at the behest of the Northern Ireland Office'.

The NIO has brought assault charges against the women POWs for defending themselves. No action has been taken against any of the screws who participated in the attack. The whole incident exposes, once again, the true face of British 'justice' and 'democracy' as it brutally tramples on the rights of Irish republicans. ■

THE COLVILLE REPORT

On 4 March Peter Brooke made public the findings of the Colville Report which was commissioned to investigate and make recommendations on the conditions in Crumlin Road prison. It followed in the wake of a bomb explosion which killed two loyalist remand prisoners on 14 November 1991.

Republican and loyalist remand prisoners in Crumlin Road are held in an integrated system which has been maintained since 1976 in an attempt to criminalise and depoliticise the prisoners. This system has led to serious attacks on both republican prisoners and their visitors. The demand for segregation has been made both inside and outside the prison for 15 years and has won the support of many prisoners' welfare groups and the families of both republican and loyalist remand prisoners.

The report not surprisingly chose to disregard the political and practical issues and merely churned out well-worn propaganda on the need for security and control.

Pam Robinson

Following his party's Potchefstroom by-election defeat at the hands of the right-wing Conservative Party, President de Klerk moved quickly to challenge the right-wing in a referendum.

Calculating correctly that the disorganised right-wing would be unable to win a short campaign on the single issue of negotiations, de Klerk phrased the referendum question carefully to ensure a maximum 'Yes' vote.

De Klerk had, in 1989/90, promised that any constitutional change would be referred to the white electorate for a decision. Holding a referendum now, with no details of the new constitution decided, fulfilled that obligation. Under the current constitution de Klerk was due to call another white-only 'general' election during 1993 in which the right was forecast to do well. Had the white electorate been asked to agree to real concessions to the black majority, the outcome may not have been so certain.

De Klerk was rewarded with a 'land-slide' Yes vote: 1,924,186 (yes) to 875,619 (no). In a country with a population of more than 30 million, the figures are too revealing of the racism at the heart of the process: 25 million or more were not consulted. The commentators propitiously concentrated on percentages: 68.6% said Yes.

That was enough of a victory for de Klerk's eager and willing international supporters to engage in a sanctions-lifting bonanza. Denmark removed its veto on the lifting of trading sanctions in the EC. Australia and Sweden lifted sanctions. The Dutch Prime Minister will visit South Africa in August. Britain promised to urge the EC to lift the ban on military contacts.

All these overtures and encouragement for de Klerk were a reward for what? On 18 March, the day after the referendum, nothing had changed, and the white minority had not conceded one inch in the process.

The white-only referendum put the African National Congress (ANC) in a quandary. As the regime's main negotiating partner in Codesa, the ANC could hardly call for its white supporters to boycott a vote for its main reform strategy. However, it was difficult to avoid the fact that this was a racist referendum which gave the white minority a veto on constitutional change. Publicly issuing a lukewarm condemnation, the ANC privately advised its supporters to vote 'Yes'.

Nelson Mandela subsequently welcomed the referendum outcome, but at the same time sounded a caution. It was a necessary recognition of grass roots ANC support:

'Ending apartheid is not just announcing the result of a referendum. It means there should be enough houses, more medical facilities, and better pensions for blacks. We are still far from this point. Above all, I still cannot vote in my own country.'

THE NEGOTIATIONS - CODESA

Codesa is the unwieldy and complex process of negotiations. Set up in December 1991, it is composed of 19 'nominated' organisations, heavily weighted towards support for the regime. The main players are the ANC and its ally, SACP, on the one side, and the government and the National Party on the other.

The full Codesa is due to meet again on 15 May to review progress - a date which has been postponed several times. It is widely predicted in ANC quarters that there will be an Interim Government in place in June and elections for a constituent assembly/interim parliament by the end of this year.

During the referendum campaign an ANC/National Party agreement was publicised on bringing black representatives swiftly into a super-cabinet for running the country during the first stages of transition. After the referendum the regime laid out 'new' proposals which did not include this. Instead it proposed a network of 'multiracial councils' in the first phase to oversee regional and local government, finance and multiracial elections.

SOUTH AFRICA - THE NEGOTIATIONS PROCESS

De Klerk wins racist referendum: black majority pays the price

Victory for South Africa's President de Klerk in the racist referendum on 17 March gave him the mandate for 'constitutional reform'. But this reform is hedged around with promises that white privilege will be preserved and no real agreements yet exist. The referendum has done nothing but open the way for sanctions-lifting and has strengthened the regime's negotiating position in Codesa. CAROL BRICKLEY analyses the current state of play in Codesa alongside the position of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) which has refused to participate.



These councils would be toothless. As far as the police and military are concerned - 'councils' would be considered, but only to 'recommend' policy. Final decisions on everything would rest with the present government in the discredited Tricameral system. As the PAC has pointed out, the 'councils' are reminiscent of the Native Representative Councils which became an avenue for collaboration earlier this century.

The government proposed that the second phase would consist of an interim parliament/constituent assembly combined, with constitutional decisions requiring a two-thirds majority

and all else decided by consensus. The regime envisages Phase Two as lasting up to ten years.

If this appears complicated, then it is worth remembering that the negotiations are aimed at producing less than majority rule. The Codesa process is intended to set pre-determined limits to the powers of a constituent assembly: in short to build in protection for white privileges. So a new 'democratic language' abounds. The regime is against 'majoritarianism' and in favour of 'disproportionate representation'.

The ANC has raised objections to the regime's 'new' proposals describing the councils as 'toy telephones' and

pointing out that the government will be both referee and player in the first stages - a point that the PAC made at the outset.

Nevertheless it remains the case that Codesa has been convened on the government's terms and the referendum has both strengthened de Klerk's hand and tied the ANC and its allies more closely to the process. If the ANC were to pull out, it would have to prove itself capable again of challenging de Klerk by mobilising mass resistance to the regime.

The regime is now demanding as a precondition for negotiated agreements that Codesa's participants op-

PAC continues fight for majority rule

The PAC responded to the referendum result by pointing to sober truths:

'It is true that 69 per cent of the White electorate voted yes, but voted yes for what? For genuine democracy and majority rule? No, they merely voted yes to ward off international sanctions and isolation... As of now we are yet to set up a democratic forum to discuss the new constitution, let alone agreeing it... there is no certainty that those who voted yes on March 17, 1992, will endorse a genuine non-racial democratic constitution based on one person one vote and majority rule.'

Correctly the PAC points out that de Klerk's reforms have followed a pattern specifically aimed at defusing international pressure rather than democratically solving problems. It has used violence to divide the black majority, whilst posing as a peacemaker and unifier.

It is for these reasons that the PAC has consistently refused to negotiate with the regime except on its own terms, or to enter Codesa as it is currently constituted. The PAC argues that negotiations must

take place in the context of the two sides: those who demand an elected constituent assembly and majority rule in a united South Africa/Azania on one side, and the regime and its supporters on the other. To this end it has persistently tried to build a Patriotic Front which represents the oppressed. It also demands that the negotiations take place in a neutral venue with a neutral chair.

This is the position that the PAC has put forward to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which it sees as a key forum for its views. At the Lusaka OAU Summit on 12 March this year, the ANC asked for support for Codesa. The OAU adopted this minute:

'Having listened to the presentations of the national liberation movements the ANC and the PAC, the Summit reviewed the developments in Southern Africa in general and in particular the peace process in South Africa aimed at paving the way for the adoption of a non-racial democratic constitution. In this regard the Summit strongly appealed for the unity among the pro-

gressive forces in the country, in particular between the two liberation movements the ANC and the PAC in the context of the Patriotic Front, as it was their opinion that only through coordinated and unified action could they effectively represent the interests of the oppressed majority in the country.'

It is in this context that the PAC has pressed for a reconvening of the Patriotic Front early in May, with a view to building a united movement for an elected constituent assembly.

At its third Congress in Umtata, Transkei, on 3-6 April, the PAC made it clear that it is not opposed, in principle, to genuine negotiations. Those negotiations must, however take place in a democratic forum with all participants having a national mandate. This will require one-person one-vote elections in a united South Africa/Azania, an elected constituent assembly to determine the new constitution, and a neutral Chair. The leadership was given a mandate to meet National Party representatives in Nigeria, under the chair of the OAU.

pose sanctions and that the ANC disband Umkhonto we Sizwe.

To do so the ANC would have to risk further criticism from its grassroots supporters. Before making this move the ANC is anxious to persuade the two liberation movements, PAC and AZAPO, who have refused to participate, to join them in Codesa. So far they have been unsuccessful.

DESTABILISATION IN THE TOWNSHIPS - BLACK PEOPLE PAY THE PRICE

The regime has not lost sight of the fact that elections will eventually be held, and the likely outcome is an ANC majority. The destabilisation in the townships is an essential means of keeping the ANC tied to Codesa and demobilising its support.

Violence reached unprecedented figures in the lead-up to the referendum, with an overall figure of at least 437 killed and 1,000 injured in March according to Human Rights Commission (HRC) reports. 74 people were killed on commuter trains. While 24 per cent of the dead were Inkatha supporters and the remainder ANC or unaffiliated, the HRC blames most of the casualties not on ANC-Inkatha rivalries but on 'unidentified' sources bent on causing destabilisation. The indiscriminate commuter train attacks have been central to this strategy, and the rail authorities and police have consistently refused to act. Only after pressure from liberation movements were any security measures introduced. It is the black communities that are paying the price for de Klerk's 'reform' process.

The oppressed majority requires real solutions that will end the minority privilege which de Klerk is determined to defend. The writing is on the wall for Codesa. Can it reach agreements that will lead to an unfettered and democratic constitution? What is certainly clear is that apartheid will only be ended when the majority is free to determine its own future.

Campaigning with City AA

'Freedom loving people are applauding your stance and urging you to carry on with ever more energy... the present is fraught with compromise and accommodation to the detriment of the majority and the solidarity work of City Group is even more necessary.'

This message from Deputy Convenor Norma Kitson opened the tenth City Group AGM on 1 March, followed by speeches from the liberation movements. Dennis Goldberg (ANC), imprisoned with David Kitson, said that South Africa was at a watershed, with the government unable to rule in the old way, but the democratic movement not yet ready to seize power. This meant that City AA's solidarity was as necessary as ever. Pule Pheto (BCMA) stressed the importance of continuing the armed struggle and sanctions until the majority gained political power. 'Our motherland is not for negotiation'

Comrade Dabi Kumalo (PAC) said that, in reality, all the so-called reforms by de Klerk have been a sham. He criticised Codesa for squandering the hard-won positions of the Patriotic Front. All the speakers thanked City AA for its principled support for the liberation struggle.

The Azania Committee from Holland brought fraternal greetings to the AGM. Throughout the day, the discussion stressed the need to step up our work to inform people in Britain about the situation in apartheid South Africa and to campaign for majority rule. Meetings were carried in support of the armed actions of APLA and AZANLA, political prisoners and sanctions.

In the run-up to the referendum, City AA held protest pickets as white South Africans came to cast their votes at the South African Embassy. On 17 March itself, on an all-day picket, speakers from PAC and BCMA, and City AA, the RCG, denounced the referendum and called for one person, one vote.

details of City AA's campaigns tel: 837 6050 Cat Wile

Imperialism consolidates counter-revolution

The catastrophic economic, political and social disintegration in Russia and the other republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) has finally spurred the Group of Seven imperialist powers to launch a \$24bn aid programme. Consisting of \$18bn in credits and loan guarantees and a further \$6bn to help stabilise the ruble, the package is designed in the first instance to stem growing political opposition to the IMF imposed 'reform programme' and control the pace of disintegration of the old socialist economy. EDDIE ABRAHAMS examines the ravages of the 'free market' and future prospects for the defence of the working class.

The imperialist powers now realise that without external aid, the economic and social collapse in the CIS could rapidly and severely undermine European economic and political stability. They are also worried by the prospect of a potentially massive opposition upsetting the capitalist restoration. Indeed just before the announcement a group of imperialist 'experts' predicted a massive social explosion unless the pace of reform was slackened. President Bush declared the package to be 'a comprehensive and integrated programme to support the struggle for freedom', and German Chancellor Kohl explained that the 'west must do everything possible to contribute towards the stabilisation of the democracy and the economy there'.

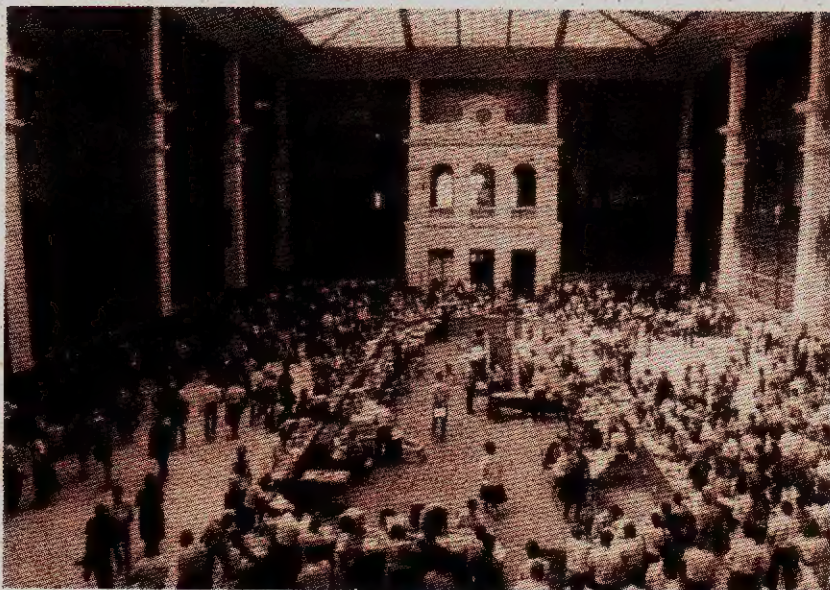
Through this programme, combining the efforts of the IMF (\$4bn), the World Bank (\$1.5bn) as well as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, export credit guarantees and food credits, the Group of Seven hope irrevocably to bind Russia and the CIS, as subordinate Third World elements, into the imperialist/capitalist market. As a by-product, they hope that the resulting stimulus to international trade and production will play some role in pushing their own economies out of recession. The programme is clearly not designed to reconstruct and revive the CIS economies along European social democratic lines. This would cost anything between \$80bn and \$160bn. The imperialists are happy to spend such sums on arms, not on the ex-socialist bloc!

The Group of Seven has made it clear that humanitarian considerations play no part in their calculations. An 'absolute precondition' for aid is that the CIS accept IMF 'adjustment programmes'. This will amount to an unprecedented attack on working class living standards and conditions. In the IMF orchestrated transition to market economy, the old centrally planned economy, the foundation of guaranteed employment and social provision, is being systematically destroyed. For the working class Latin American poverty, not Swedish style social democratic affluence, has already arrived.

At the beginning of January, in a first major step towards the capitalist market, the Russian government freed most prices of goods and services from state control. Immediately average prices shot up by between 250% and 700% as monopoly hoarders, speculators and merchants prepared to make massive profits. Overnight, 80% of Russia's 150 million population was pushed below the government's poverty line as even subsistence goods were priced out of reach. In order to pre-empt working class resistance the government doubled wages to 750 rubles. Yet even on official calculations an average family needs 1300 rubles to rise above the poverty line. In true capitalist fashion, Russia's Minister for Economy urged workers to 'restrain wage demands' in the interests of fighting hyperinflation!

Mass unemployment is also about to hit the working class. IMF imposed reforms will withdraw subsidies from and devastate and privatise services, agriculture and industry. The result will be devastating. Hitherto affecting mainly women and the civil servants, the International Labour Organisation predicts that by the end of 1992 unemployment could reach 15 million for the whole of the CIS. A further 30 million workers are threatened with imminent redundancy. They are so severely under-employed as to be effectively without work. The same report notes that of the 500,000 so far registered unemployed, a mere 16% receive benefits. The figure for the USA, which does not even have a welfare state, is 34%! The government is nevertheless planning to cut unemployment pay, regarding present levels as too generous.

Imperialism, through the IMF, is dictating terms which will make the



ABOVE: communists protest against the market. LEFT: a glittering new commodities exchange in Moscow. RIGHT: begging in Red Square.

position worse. By the end of June 1992 all remaining price controls will be lifted and a massive 28% VAT on most goods will be restored. This measure was initially withdrawn for fear of popular protest. In addition, as with Third World countries, the IMF is demanding that Russia's budget deficit be reduced to one per cent of GNP. This means further drastic cuts in all subsidies to education, health, welfare, housing and cultural work.

These 'economic reforms' are destroying the productive and administrative apparatus of the old centrally planned economy. A report from the Institute of International Finance notes that:

'The breakdown of a unified administrative structure will disrupt traditional trade flows... shortages of material inputs are likely to intensify. Real net material product (NMP) may fall another 15% in Russia... and output may fall... by more than a quarter in several republics.'

In 1992 oil production is likely to drop by 14% from last year's depleted levels, iron and steel by 15%, chemicals by 16% and food products by 18%. In January alone, retail trade, measured in physical terms fell by 63%, processed milk for sale on the market fell by 46% and tractor production, vital for agriculture, by 49%. These statistics of collapse spell greater misery for the working class. For the first time in generations Russia is seeing queues for bread.

Economic collapse is compounded by the disintegration of effective government. With no effective fiscal administration billions of rubles are being lost to tax evaders and other

thieves. The government's weakness and lack of grip is revealed in remarks by academic Georgi Arbatov. He claims that the Russian government is:

'... the most disorganised... They don't answer letters, don't reply to phone calls on the special line; they don't carry out their commitments... in the new structure of power, corruption is practically legalised and without limit.'

This state of affairs is by no means deplored by all. This, after all, is the form taken by the transition to capitalism and the emergence of a new ruling class. While the majority are hurled into poverty, a tiny minority of unbridled and selfish bourgeois aspirants, working with the IMF, imperialist advisors, banks and companies are hoping to accumulate capital through speculation, theft and corruption of all sorts. It is they who will benefit from the Group of Seven aid package, not the working class.

While the economy collapses and millions face hunger, Russia's new 'entrepreneurs' are hoarding nearly \$15bn of desperately needed hard currency in overseas banks. For a large kickback they are planning to sell off the ex-Soviet Union's largest enterprises in oil, gas, telecommunications and car sectors to imperialist firms. Meanwhile, they are simply distributing among themselves huge chunks of state property and land!

The Yeltsin government does not exist to fashion a 'new democratic order' for the Russian people. It is an agent not of renewal but of the Latin Americanisation of the former USSR. The current Russian government is

proposing to return to a handful of private owners the means of production which belong to the Russian people, and transform workers once more into wage slaves and serfs to capital. Throughout Russia and the CIS a new layer of greedy, narrow minded and selfish millionaires is now flourishing. They lack any principles or ideals besides making money at the expense of public property. They do not care what happens to their republics or the masses so long as they themselves make money.

However, their consolidation of political, economic and social power is not taking place without potentially explosive contradictions. The collapse of the economy and the diminishing national product has led to severe clashes for control of land, property and wealth by the differing factions of the aspirant bourgeoisie. This is expressed in intense nationalist rivalries ranging from bloody military clashes in the Caucasus to the, for the moment, virulent political contest between Russia and the Ukraine. Even Russia is threatened with disintegration as the leadership of its 20 autonomous regions bid for control of immensely profitable oil, gas, diamond, gold and other resources.

Meanwhile, the extreme polarisation of wealth and poverty could precipitate massive social upheaval and a sustained working class opposition to marketisation. Already, there are weekly protests against the Yeltsin government in almost every major town across Russia. In February, fearful of a miners strike, the government trebled their wages only to be confronted with demands for similar rises by bus drivers and teachers. Popular discontent is providing

fertile ground for the organised political opposition which includes: besides communist and social democratic forces, some outright fascist and anti-semitic elements.

In a struggle against the working class, the new regime is by no means assured of victory. Its governmental writ does not run far and its state apparatus and machinery of repression is at the moment weak and relatively ineffective. Revealing of the new state's weakness was a comment by Alexander Shokin, a Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour:

'The gap between the federal structures and the local level is very wide. We can issue any number of decrees but it is very difficult to implement them on a local level.'

The armed forces inherited from the old regime are unreliable and in a process of disintegration. General Samsonov, Chief of Staff of CIS forces, speaking of desertions and draft evasion, said:

'The situation has arisen where we can no longer defend ourselves. There is no one left. There are units in which officers have to stand guard. It is shameful.'

Solving this problem is the Yeltsin government's priority task. They are aware that democratic rights for the working class are not compatible with a process of capitalist restoration in which the majority of the working class is impoverished. They have noted that trade unions, left-wing opposition and the working class generally are already using the limited democratic rights available to oppose the brazen theft and robbery of the new elite. Increasingly, therefore, voices are heard demanding a Pinochet-style dictatorship. Only recently, Russian Minister of Security, Viktor Barannikov, noted:

'The only real force that can defend the reform in Russia is the armed forces and our apparatus. The people are sick of perestroika. Only armed detachments can guarantee the success of reforms.'

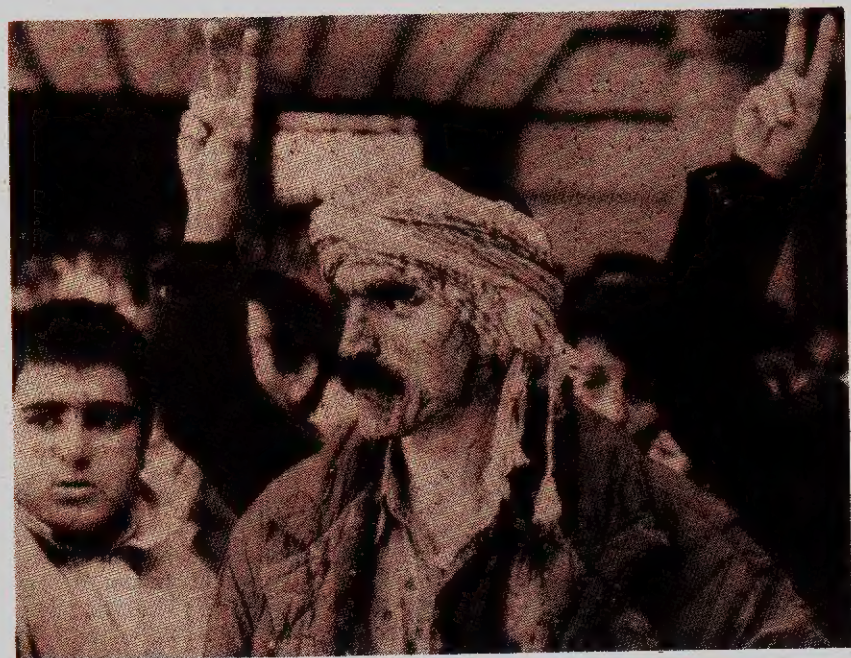
Speaking of the Russian Parliament where the opposition is growing stronger, Barannikov said:

'These are good for nothings. They should be dispersed.'

To this end Yeltsin is trying to consolidate a new militia and an officer corp. He has doubled the officers' salaries and offered them extensive benefits and privileges. Simultaneously, the Yeltsin government is strengthening its elite 'anti-corruption/crime' force OMON which was used against a communist war veterans' demonstration on 23 February. Despite the problems that beset it, the new regime remains immensely powerful. It has control of financial resources, it controls the media and has the means to develop a repressive apparatus. But most crucially it has the backing of imperialism which can, when necessary, temporarily buy off sections who are moving into opposition to 'reform'.

The working class movement confronts incredible difficulties and will have to make complicated political decisions as it organises to resist capitalist restoration. The organised left-wing opposition is small and divided into two main blocks. The Trudoyava Rossiya groups the All Union of Bolsheviks (followers of Stalin and Brezhnev), the Russian Communist Workers Party (a Marxist-Leninist grouping but not 'Stalinist') and the Communist Union. Another bloc unites the Socialist Party of Working People, led by ex-CPSU member Roy Medvedev, the Russian Party of Labour and the Russian Party of Communists. Inheriting all the accumulated discredit of the past, these forces are at the moment relatively isolated. But if they succeed in uniting on a common platform in defence of the working class, they could present a formidable obstacle to capitalist restoration.

Demirel's 'friendship' turns into bloody assault



Kurdish demonstrators after police attack in London

London:

Police attack Kurdish demonstration

Kurdish people in London responded rapidly to the massacres in Kurdistan. At 11am on 24 March 400 Kurdish men, women and children gathered outside the Turkish Embassy in Belgrave Square to protest. Within five minutes of their arrival the number of police on duty increased dramatically from 20 to more than 100.

Hezil, a Kurdish woman who was there with her two daughters, Dilan and Berivan, explained what happened next: 'The police attacked us with dogs... the police attacked children and old people. They threw the children on the ground and children were pulled from their mothers' arms and thrown. We were not there to fight with the police, but they hit us as if they wanted to kill us. They threw the children over a fence into a park. Three children were taken to hospital - one four year old girl had her fingers broken by a police truncheon. We were very surprised that the police attacked with dogs and that they attacked children. If English people believe the police are democratic; that's not true.'

Dilan, aged 10 explained: 'We didn't want to fight the police, but they brought their dogs to scare the children. There was one boy who picked up a stone and the police turned their dogs on him. All the children were crying afterwards. People were scared, people were running away. I was frightened of the dogs. There were maybe 20 of them. At first the dogs didn't want to scare the children, the dogs were laughing as if it was a game, and then the police shouted at the dogs and the dogs changed. The police said to me "Why aren't you in school?" and I said, "Because they are killing people in Kurdistan". The policeman said he was going to get me with three dogs, but I said "I'm not scared." The police then pushed me on the bench

and hurt my leg. It's not only police in Kurdistan who are nasty.'

Berivan, aged 8, added: 'We were all shouting "Biji Apo! Biji PKK!" and the police hit the people at the back. They hit us with long sticks. People's heads were broken. We want to say to English children that the police are not nice for Kurdish people, Turkish people or English people.'

Over 30 Kurdish people were injured during the attack. Nine were hospitalised including one man taken to intensive care with serious head injuries. Most of the injured had been beaten on the head and back. Seventeen Kurds were arrested, and four of the injured, detained in Rochester Row police station, were denied medical treatment for eight hours after their arrest.

The Kurds' description of the ferocity of the police attack was supported by statements from independent witnesses. The Kurds are now facing various charges including public disorder and criminal damage. It remains to be seen whether the police will be called to account for their actions. Scotland Yard has initiated an internal inquiry into the behaviour of the police, but the Kurds do not want a whitewash. They are demanding an independent public inquiry.

It is no coincidence that the Chief of Staff of the Turkish Military was in London that day, having talks with the Foreign Office. The Demirel government has made clear to its imperialist allies that it regards as terrorists all those organising for Kurdish self-determination. As a loyal ally of the Turkish state, and with economic interests in the Middle East that would be threatened by the emergence of an independent Kurdistan, Britain is more than willing to unleash its bootboys to terrorise Kurdish refugees in London.

Jenny Sutton

In *FRFI* 105 we analysed the Turkish government's Kurdish policy in the context of its attempts to create and exploit a pragmatic layer of collaborationists, while at the same time setting out to destroy the PKK-led armed resistance. In the short run, the Turkish bourgeoisie has been exposed as having no other policy than terror. This has been confirmed by reports from Turkish and Kurdish MPs returning from Kurdish provinces. ATALAY YILMAZ and MURAD AKIN report.

The press has launched a campaign to provide the psychological preconditions for an intensification of the 'dirty war' against the Kurdish people, claiming that the PKK was preparing for an armed uprising. During the traditional Kurdish New Year celebrations, *Newroz*, Turkish special squads opened fire on the masses demonstrating in the streets of Cizre, Silopi, Sirkak, Idil, Van and other cities. Everything had been planned and, except for one policeman who was lynched when he ran out of ammunition, all those killed were children, women and other civilians.

Some Kurdish and Turkish Marxists had foreseen the possibility of such a massacre, despite an artificial optimism generated by MPs up to the eve of *Newroz*. The *Newroz* demonstrations were not an open armed insurgency but, rather, the rising of a civilian mass movement. The guerrillas made a partial and limited intervention only after the demonstrations had been dispersed by fire from the 'special squads'.

The aim of this provocation, which occurred in spite of government

declarations that peaceful demonstrations would not be prevented, was to force the armed guerrillas into a very unequal confrontation and to use *Newroz* as an opportunity to crush the resistance. Once again, the bourgeoisie has resorted to 'Bloody Sunday' tactics... some things, indeed, never change.

The artificial optimism and expectations generated around the new Demirel government by some Kurdish politicians, together with conflicting declarations about whether an uprising was on the agenda or not, contributed to the vulnerability of the mass movement during *Newroz*.

The Turkish bourgeoisie saw HEP (People's Labour Party) as a moderate influence on those sections of the Kurdish resistance movement which sought a legal form of open political expression. But the problem is that this party, which has its origins in the Social Democratic Populist Party, was also used as a way of legitimising the new government in Kurdistan. The leadership of this party is not merely neither socialist nor revolutionary, but actually anti-socialist. In

many cases some HEP politicians and some other Kurdish leaders tried to convince the new government to extend democratic rights, using parallels between 'the collapse of the walls' (ie the collapse of the socialist countries) and the emancipation of the Kurdish 'citizens'.

The popular liberation movement incorporates different class elements: the Turkish state needs to turn these into a source of division and collaboration within Kurdish ranks. Several of the newly-elected Kurdish MPs did not confront the Demirel government at the very beginning. This helped foster illusions in a democratic facade. Demirel's government is a continuation of ANAP (Motherland Party) government in regard to the 'Kurdish problem'. The massacre of *Newroz* showed clearly that there is a consensus among the Turkish bourgeoisie which transcends the political parties. That's why Demirel's rhetorical show of 'friendship' generated only terror.

In the general regional context, the Kurdish bourgeois opportunist leaders in Iraq, Talabani and Barzani,

Kurdistan: eyewitness account

Massacres and resistance in Ku

On 21 March 1992 the Kurdish people celebrated *Newroz*, the Kurdish New Year, on a hitherto unprecedented scale, celebrating the resistance of the blacksmith Kawa more than 2,600 years ago.

In north west Kurdistan the Kurdish people took another giant step towards national unity, by coming out on the streets in their tens of thousands from Mount Ararat in the North, to Cizre in the South and Dersim in the Northwest.

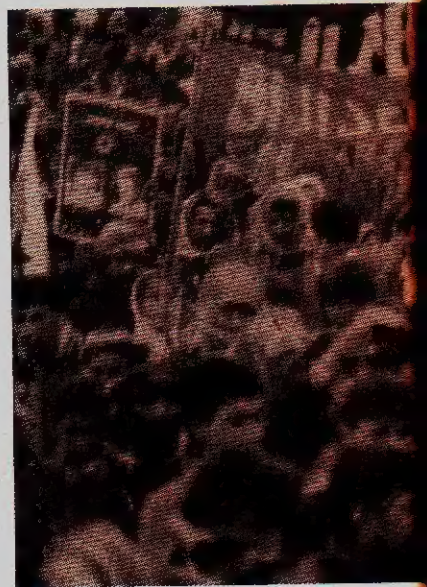
The people lit bonfires in the streets and danced, carrying posters bearing the picture of Apo, the leader of the PKK, and Kurdish flags. This was despite a two-month long psychological war waged by the Turkish government and its pliant press, which had warned the Kurdish people with thinly disguised threats of massacres.

In Cizre the Turkish armed forces could not stomach the sight of this joyful expression of a separate Kurdish identity; the Turkish police played martial Turkish music at full volume in their armoured cars and draped them with Turkish flags.

Since the previous day, all eyes had been on Cizre, which is a stronghold of the PKK. The Turkish and foreign

press arrived on Thursday 19 March and the next day, the eve of *Newroz*, two village guards (state militia) were found hanged from lamp-posts with a village guard's salary stuffed in their mouths. The PKK's amnesty for the village guards was due to run out on 21 March, and this was a timely warning to those backward elements that insist on serving the Turkish oppressor. On the evening of 20 March, tracer bullets were fired into the sky from the flat roofs of the houses in the narrow streets of Cizre as the people began to celebrate *Newroz*. This was seen by millions on Turkish television.

Meanwhile, in Dicle (Tigris) University in Diyarbakir, 500 students celebrated *Newroz* in the canteen, performing sketches portraying the resistance in Diyarbakir prison in 1982 when the 'modern Kawa' Mazlum Dogan was martyred as he celebrated *Newroz* in his cell. Pictures of Mazlum and Zekiye Alkan, a student who committed suicide by setting herself alight two years ago in protest at massacres by the Turkish army, looked down from the walls. An ERNK (National Liberation Front of Kurdistan) flag was hoisted by two students in guerrilla



garb during the sketches. The police were nowhere to be seen.

On 21 March, MPs Leyla Zana and Hatip Dicle visited the grave of the murdered chairman of Diyarbakir People's Labour Party (HEP) Vedat Aydin, before returning to the party building and beginning the celebrations. A giant picture of Kawa with the slogan



Turkish tanks and soldiers move onto streets in Sirkak

who came to terms with Saddam, helped the Turkish bourgeoisie to create a comparable collaborationist tendency within the national liberation struggle in north west Kurdistan to try and isolate the revolutionary tendency of the Kurdish resistance movement which the PKK leads. In the Turkish political context, social democrats provide a bridge for the Turkish bourgeoisie by assimilating Kurdish 'democrats': they seek to divert the political line of the revolutionary section of the Kurdish resistance movement away from developing clear, consistent class positions. If the state is to succeed in uniting and maintaining the interests of the propertied classes in this part of the Middle East while preserving political stability, we will see more massacres, more gassings, more betrayals and more 'undemocratic solutions'.

Another aspect of the Newroz massacre was the critical stance the German government took towards the Turkish state. Unfortunately in

the absence of powerful revolutionary support from the Turkish working class, the imposition of the New World Order in the Middle East (following the collapse of the socialist countries) has created a political vacuum which is being filled by competing imperialist forces. German imperialists are not in any way concerned about the Kurdish national liberation struggle: they only want to strengthen their hand against the United States. Turkish workers and Kurdish people should expect nothing from a Turkish parliament; but nor should they expect anything from international bodies or regional balances of power determined by the requirements of imperialist powers. Neither NATO nor the United Nations is the place to which recourse should be made. NATO is still the enemy of the people of the Middle East, and the UN proved its subordination to imperialism during the Gulf War. These bodies are crystallised, organisational forms of the New World Order.

Turkish and Kurdish Marxists know very well the real reasons why Germany announced the suspension of arms supplies to Turkey after reports that those arms were used against Kurdish people. After all, for 15 years the Panzers imported from Germany were used to crush and shoot the leftists and workers in major cities without any objection from the country which supplied them.

What the massacre of Newroz did reveal was a lack of response from the big cities, stemming from the indifference of the Turkish working class to the national question. This handicap arises, in the first place, from the nationalistic traditions of the Turkish left, its heritage of Kemalism and a long erosion of an internationalist consciousness – the results of social democracy, petty-bourgeois revolutionary movements and the historical pro-state inclinations of traditional leftist parties. This indifference is increased further by the depoliticising policy of the new government in the industrial heartlands,

Germany

Arming Turkish terror

As in other European countries, in Germany there were numerous protest actions by Kurds against the attacks of the Turkish army on the civilian population. Simultaneously the weapons deliveries from Germany to the Turkish state became a political issue – the Minister of Defence was forced to resign.

Directly after the first massacre in north west Kurdistan, Kurdish demonstrators stormed the Consulates in Berlin, Hanover, Hamburg, Mainz and Frankfurt, and banks and travel agencies were demolished in other towns like Nuremberg and Kassel. The police were not prepared for these actions and only because of errors made by the demonstrators in Mainz were four Kurds arrested; they are still in detention.

After a former GDR people's army Panzer tank was shown on TV in action against Kurdish demonstrators, political anger was high. First it was revealed that, despite a ban, 15 Leopard Panzers had been sent to Turkey. This led to the departure of Defence Minister Stoltenberg: his ministry was also involved in illegal sales of submarines to South Africa and the state army had illegally tried to send Panzers to Israel, declaring them to be agricultural tools.

Later, it was revealed that military assistance over the last 10 years has reached about DM10bn. In the last year alone Turkey received over 300,000 Kalashnikovs, several billion rounds of ammunition, armaments equipment, radios, troop carriers and NVA Panzers. Among them, 120 Leopard Panzers, lorries, helicopters, G3 arms and other military devices were provided for the federal army. Also the Turkish police have received weapons, communications equipment and computers.

For combating the uprising, Turkish policemen received training from GSG9 – a special force akin to the SAS – and were sent also on tracking dogs. The village guards in Kurdistan were also equipped with G3 arms.

For three years, a cell of 20 PKK members has been on trial, charged with terrorist activity. The Kurdish community is subject to racism and harassment by the German police.

The conflict between the Turkish state and the FRG is only temporary. Foreign Minister Genscher will visit Turkey in April and it is expected that the weapons deliveries which have stopped for the time being will be resumed this year. ■

Rainer

and the paralysing effects of the trade union bureaucracy on the political vision of the working class. Finally, this lack of support is to some extent fed by the narrow-minded nationalistic pragmatism found among Kurdish politicians.

What is clear after the Newroz massacre is that the triangle of National Security Council, Parliament and National Intelligence Organisation can produce nothing other than terror in the short term, and that social democracy has no contradiction with this policy.

Another outcome of this trial of strength of the Turkish state, acting without restraint against the Kurdish people, was that it confirmed the impotence of the Turkish left to create its own independent, principled organisation to conduct class struggle on a national level, and to enter into an active interaction and solidarity with the Kurdish national revolutionary struggle.

In relation to this, it must be emphasised that the Turkish working

class will suffer deeply in its struggle against the bourgeoisie if it allows the Turkish ruling class to smash the Kurdish resistance movement. If the Turkish bourgeoisie gains a victory in Cizre, in Sirkak or in Diyarbakir, this will boomerang to become a victory over the workers in Istanbul, Adana, Zonguldak and other Turkish cities.

The force which is indispensable in this turmoil, and which will link the class struggle with anti-imperialist resistance must be the socialist revolutionary organisation of the workers in Turkey. If this is to be built it will have to be independent from the ruling classes and any type of nationalism. The real allies of those who fight and are shot in the streets and mountains of Kurdistan are those who are suppressed and exploited in the factories of the big cities. The Turkish working class must not bear the shame of the oppression of the Kurdish people – let that be the lesson for all of us when we remember the Newroz massacre! ■

Kurdistan



Newroz'a we piroz be ('May your Newroz be happy' – but it doesn't really translate well!) was hung from the third floor window as people lit fires in the street and danced around them. Children brought wooden scaffolding poles from building sites and their elder brothers brought old tyres, which are the favourite fuel for Newroz fires

in Kurdistan. Soon the flames were leaping and black smoke spiralling into the Diyarbakir sky.

Thousands of people had gathered by 1pm when Leyla Zana called on the people to spread the celebration all over the city, and the people continued the festivities in other parts of town, but there was little confrontation with the police. Prior to Newroz there had been a farcical sequence of events when firstly the HEP were given permission to use the local sports stadium for a Newroz celebration. The next day the permission was withdrawn. Then on the day before Newroz Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel rang the Diyarbakir governor and ordered permission to be given. This was all part of the government's pretence that people were free to celebrate Newroz. The HEP in Diyarbakir announced that they had decided not to use the stadium as they had no faith in the authorities and were fed up with being messed about.

Meanwhile, in Cizre the people also began the day by marching to the cemetery. On the way back into town they were fired on by commandos and special forces units. A Swedish journalist, Hans Dubber, was arrested by special forces personnel. In his words, 'I was made to lie on the floor in a house which the units were using as a temporary base. When we came under fire they dragged me to where they took up position. I took advantage of the confusion

to eat some pieces of paper with addresses on them. They thought I was a Kurd with a European passport so I was quite badly beaten. It was obvious that they hated the people of Cizre and saw them all as "terrorists". In Sirkak the people were also raked with bullets after they reacted angrily to male police trying to search women celebrating Newroz. The total dead in Cizre and Sirkak was over 50 with dozens injured and hundreds arrested.

On the evening of 21 March, gunfire was heard all over Sirkak. It was announced that 150 PKK 'terrorists' had attacked Sirkak, and the next day the wife of the police chief desperately rang a private TV company in Ankara saying, 'Please save us. We are out of ammunition.' However, after the smoke had subsided it turned out that the guerrillas had not attacked Sirkak. The PKK announced that it was a provocation by state forces. The chief of police in Sirkak was duly posted to a city in central Turkey.

Indeed, the fact that there was not one casualty among the security forces bears this out. In fact it was the people of Sirkak who suffered, most of the houses being badly damaged and 85 lorries being wrecked.

It appears that the state forces engaged in an elaborate provocation to put the blame for the Newroz massacres on the PKK, a line only too eagerly seized upon by the Turkish press. They blam-

ed the PKK for the deaths in Cizre, Sirkak and Nusaybin, saying there had been 'clashes'; a euphemism used by the official Turkish news sources to disguise killings by the security forces.

Some apologists for Demirel claimed the incidents had been 'provoked' by 'irresponsible elements' in the security forces intent on weakening the coalition government, and say that Demirel sincerely believes in the government's democratisation programme. These circles make a lot of the alleged differences between President Ozal and Prime Minister Demirel, claiming that Demirel is a changed man. But his 'democratic credentials' hardly bear up to close examination.

When *Sabah* correspondent Izzet Keser was shot by security forces, the newspaper admitted it had been firing from state forces that caused his death. But the TRT (Turkish Radio and Television) talked of his being caught in crossfire.

Public protests concerning the use of surplus East German armoured cars against the Kurds in Cizre led to the German Foreign Minister, Hans Dietrich Genscher, declaring the suspension of arms sales to Turkey. This provoked anger in Turkey. The presence in Cizre of a German delegation including MPs and human rights activists and two German camera teams is thought to have been influ-

ential. A delegation from Britain was notable by its absence, people in Britain being caught up in a tradition that culminated on 9 April.

The whitewashing of the role played by the security forces during the 'Bloody Newroz' was met with anger in the Kurdish region of Turkey where people knew the truth of what had happened, and the demands for the Kurdish MPs within the coalition partner SHP (Social Democrat Populist Party) to resign increased. Finally, on 31 March 1992, 14 of the 19 remaining MPs resigned and two days later added their signatures to a statement demanding action from the United Nations and other international bodies to ensure international conventions were being adhered to by the Turkish security forces.

Following events of Newroz 1992, the Kurdish people in Northwest Kurdistan have realised more clearly that they can expect nothing from a Turkish parliament that continually spouts vacuously about 'unity and togetherness' and 'equality' while the armed forces apply an iron fist policy in Kurdistan.

The Kurdish people are more aware than ever that their destiny lies in their own hands and that now is an historic opportunity to realise their centuries-old desire for a free and independent Kurdistan. ■

Alan Greaves

Blackburn was once a defender of Leninism. Today, his transformation into a social democrat mirrors the fate of a substantial section of middle class socialists who constituted the 'revolutionary left' of the 60s and 70s. Then, they adopted revolutionary, even Marxist, phrases. But as a social group their aim was only to frighten existing authority for a greater share of material privilege. Today they no longer need Marxism. Marxism is not compatible with the defence of privilege. So instead they turn to left-social democracy. The collapse of the socialist bloc provides their excuse to settle accounts with their 'revolutionary' ideals.

Blackburn opens by telling us that: 'the ruin of "Marxism-Leninism" has been sufficiently comprehensive to eliminate it as an alternative to capitalism and compromise the very idea of socialism.'

He then sets out to account for 'the dire experience of communism since 1917.'

What is this 'dire experience'? The free social and medical provision and guaranteed employment provided to the Soviet people? Soviet support for national liberation movements? Support for Cuba? Can anti-fascist veterans of World War Two believe communism since 1917 was a 'dire experience'?

Clearly Blackburn examines the Soviet experience from the standpoint of the materially comfortable middle class of the imperialist countries. A communist examines the problems and failings of communism since 1917 within the context of its fundamentally progressive role. Social democrats regard the socialist bloc's irrefutably positive features as incidental elements of a fundamentally 'dire experience'.

Blackburn, Marxism and Leninism

Having thus dismissed communism, Blackburn turns on those he deems responsible - Lenin and the Bolshevik Party.

'With respect to mainstream Marxism, Lenin's Bolshevik current came to represent a species of political voluntarism.'

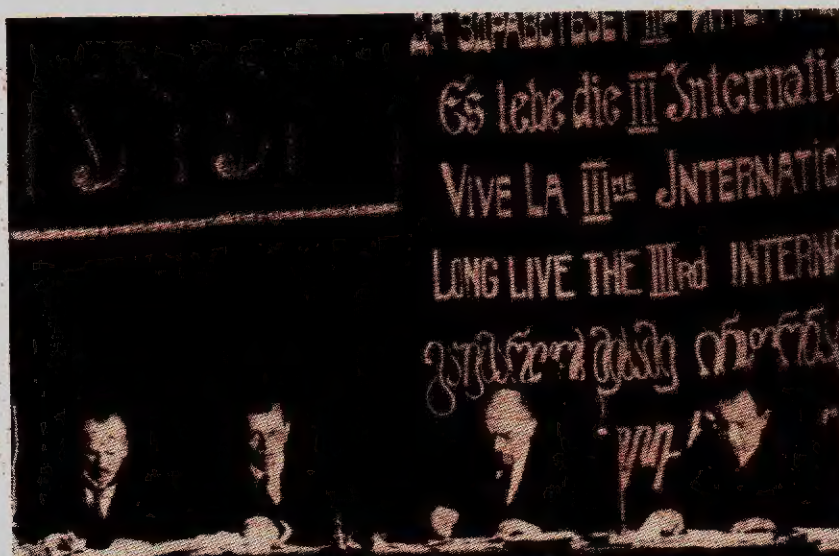
By this Blackburn means that in 1917 the Bolsheviks acted without regard for objective economic and social conditions and attempted a premature revolution. To sustain this case he rehabilitates, as 'notable Marxists of the day', Second International theoreticians such as Kautsky, Plekhanov and Martov who broke with Marxism in 1914! In the 20th century the socialist movement's standpoint on imperialism, war, national liberation and socialist revolution - right up to the dictatorship of the proletariat - defines the divide between communists and social democrats, between revolutionaries and opportunists. On all these issues, Kautsky and Co adopted a reactionary stand.

After 1914 the international socialist movement - the Second International - split over these issues. During the 1914-18 First Imperialist War for the distribution of the oppressed nations among the imperialist powers, Kautsky and Co refused to oppose their own imperialist ruling class' warmongering. After the War and its resulting carnage and hunger, revolutions shook the foundations of the capitalist order in Europe. In all cases Blackburn's 'notable Marxists' opposed these revolutions and opposed the dictatorship of the proletariat - the transfer of political power to the working class.

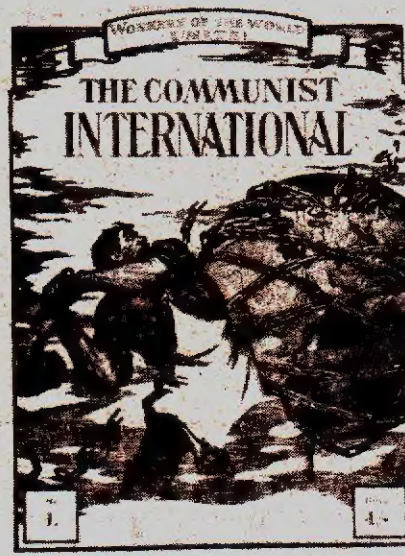
The Third, Communist, International emerged to fight the treachery of the Second International. Within it, Marxist-Leninists were in fact 'the mainstream.' They recognised the 1914-1918 war as imperialist and, unlike Kautsky and Co, called for self-determination for oppressed nations. They also urged the working

Robin Blackburn and the future of socialism

The collapse of the socialist bloc has given a field day to 'left-wing' critics of Marxism-Leninism. Among them is Robin Blackburn, editor of *New Left Review* (NLR). His article, 'Fin de siècle: Socialism after the Crash', published in NLR 185, aims to drive a wedge between socialism and Marxism-Leninism. In opposition to the Third International's communist traditions, Blackburn works to rehabilitate the standpoint of Second International social democracy. EDDIE ABRAHAMS examines the class basis of the 'New Left'.



LEFT: First Congress of the Third International, Moscow, March 1919. RIGHT: first English edition of *The Communist International*, May 1919.



class to transform the war into a civil war and socialist revolution.

Ignoring these fundamental divisions, Blackburn invokes Kautsky's authority to condemn Lenin and the Bolshevik Party as a 'conspiratorial, Jacobin, doctrinaire strain' within socialism! Such epithets only disguise opposition to the overthrow of capitalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. For social democracy discussion of revolution is always 'doctrinaire', the seizure of political power by the working class 'political voluntarism' and the dictatorship of the proletariat a 'Jacobin excess'.

Blackburn also dishonestly uses Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg against Lenin, claiming they criticised his theory of the party 'for its Jacobinism and commandism'. True, Trotsky did so, but later, after conceding he had been wrong, he joined the Bolshevik Party in 1917 and played a leading role in the Revolution. Rosa Luxemburg also had many criticisms of the Bolshevik Party. But her overall assessment was that:

'All the revolutionary honour and capacity which western social democracy lacked were represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honour of international socialism.'

Blackburn and the Russian Revolution

Blackburn, in contrast, believes the Russian Revolution to have been an historic error. He quotes Kautsky: 'The Bolsheviks... tackled problems for the solution of which all conditions were lacking.' And adds that:

'Kautsky pointed out that they lacked the requisite social basis and capacity for true socialisation and sustained, diversified economic growth.'

This is the Second International, Menshevik, refrain. Russia was economically backward, capitalism was underdeveloped and the working class a minority. A socialist revolution, therefore, would be premature; its objective basis - developed capitalism - did not exist. The working class in consequence must limit its

struggle to attaining a bourgeois democratic republic. Anything more would be 'political voluntarism'.

In fact, the Bolsheviks were aware of the immense problems posed by Russian economic and cultural backwardness. But they saw Russia as the 'weak link' in a system of imperialist/capitalist states and the Revolution as part of an international socialist offensive, taking in the more advanced capitalist countries. Lenin noted:

'Regarded from the world-historical point of view, there would doubtless be no hope for the ultimate victory of our revolution, if we were to remain alone.'

He insisted that: '... our salvation is an all European revolution'.

After the 1914-1918 war, revolutions did sweep across Europe - Germany, Italy, Austria and Hungary. In all cases they were suppressed, with utmost savagery, by Second International 'socialists' in alliance with the ruling class. German social democracy even murdered Rosa Luxemburg and Kark Liebknecht.

Given the historical circumstances the Bolshevik Party did the only thing possible. A revolution does not involve only individuals, parties or single classes. It is a massive explosion of social, economic and political contradictions which cannot be contained within the old regime. It is an acute sharpening of class antagonisms to the point of insurrection and civil war. In such situations compromise is not possible. One or the other main classes, in alliance with sections of other classes, must prevail and impose its will on society.

Such was the Russian Revolution. The old Tsarist ruling class was an alliance of landed aristocrats and the industrial bourgeoisie backed by a fascist military clique led by Kornilov (the Russian Pinochet, Shah or Somosa). Against them stood the millions of peasants and workers driven to revolt by the intolerable conditions of war and famine. A bourgeois social democratic republic in Russia, devastated by war and with no imperialist plunder, was the pipe-dream of Plekhanov and the Mensheviks.

Had the Russian working class not seized power and ruthlessly suppressed the White Counter-Revolu-

tion, the Russian ruling class would have imposed a military tyranny and crushed all the democratic and social aspirations of the working class and peasantry. The truth of this was proved in regions captured by the Whites during the Civil War.

History has confirmed the Bolshevik position. The Revolution, burdened by massive economic backwardness, was subjected to relentless imperialist encirclement, military assault and economic sabotage. As a result it suffered enormous defects and weaknesses. Nevertheless, the Soviet economy, on the basis of incredibly small resources, began systematically to eliminate poverty, illiteracy, hunger and homelessness and secured enormous cultural advances for the masses.

Rather than attribute the Revolution's failings to the 'Jacobin' or 'voluntarist' 'excesses' of Leninism we adopt Rosa Luxemburg's Marxist approach:

'The blame for the failures of Bolshevism is borne in the final analysis by the international proletariat and above all by the unprecedented and persistent baseness of German (we would add British) social democracy.'

Blackburn, Marx and the market

Having rehabilitated the Second International to attack Leninism, Blackburn then attacks the socialist planned economy. In defence of his alternative 'socialised market', he rehabilitates, among others, Marx's 'anarchist critics! After all some of Marx's rhetoric now seems overly simple'. Marxism also contains a 'strain of... arrogance towards small producers'. In contrast Proudhon, 'acclaimed a precursor of market socialism', 'had a greater sensitivity... to the significance of petty production and exchange'. While Bakunin, 'who was worried that Marx had too narrow a conception of who was a worker', had 'prescient remarks' on the dangers of 'state socialism'.

Having thus enriched his thought, Blackburn advances a strikingly new 'starting point for politics and economics' - not the class interests of

the working class, not the emancipation of humanity from the shackles of capital. No. The starting point 'must be' 'respect for individual choice'. And the market is the best mechanism. The market:

'... in and through the reaction to it also broadens the potential scope of human solidarity.'

Go and tell that to the starving people in the African continent's market, to the street children in Brazil's market, to the impoverished millions in the ex-USSR's newly-installed market.

For Blackburn the market is a neutral mechanism, even 'an aspect of the forces of production' amenable to socialist regulation. In fact, in the real world, the market is far from neutral, technical factor of economic production. It expresses a social relation of capitalist production. Under capitalism, production and distribution, carried out individually, for profit not for social use, are regulated unconsciously by the law of value which acquires social form in the market. The market, by its mere existence, expresses the anarchy of production - the fact that society does not control production and cannot consciously organise it towards desired social ends.

The economic plan, on the other hand, expresses social relations of production which are organised and regulated consciously by society in the interests of society. The centralised economic plan is the socialist method of overcoming the isolation of individual capitalist production, of overcoming the anarchy and wastefulness of capitalist production.

The market and the plan are compatible. They each express different class interests. A socialist society may be forced to rely on several limited market mechanisms - but only as a temporary measure. Eventually one or the other, the market or the plan, the bourgeoisie or the working class, must prevail.

Blackburn's theory is so much cosmetic to disguise a rehash of the discredited Left Alternative Strategy of the 70s. In place of a centrally planned economy, he offers a far more - a combination of market and plan - a regulated market which curbs capitalist exploitation without abolishing capital. Wishing to achieve 'socialism' without revolution and bloodshed, he devises a 'system' which satisfies all classes - workers, bankers, petty producers, entrepreneurs and even the ecologically concerned street traders.

Through 'taxation and social insurance' a progressive government 'could prevent class-like inequalities' resulting from the market. Private capital would become a 'socialist entrepreneurialism' but without the 'momentum of capitalist accumulation and its propensity to plunder and divide'. And tax would restore morality to the bankers and holding companies by 'engaging' them to 'offer funds' for 'socially desirable investments' central planning authorities 'socialised market' 'could also do effective but socially less disruptive and painful substitutes for bankruptcy and unemployment.'

Imperialist capital, without qualm, murders hundreds of thousands for the sake of profit. It will sit idly by and allow Blackburn's 'socialist authorities' to curb its appetites. Capital's urge for profit is a relentless creation of inequality, total disregard for 'socially desirable investment' can only be destroyed by suppressing the capitalist class, establishing working class power - the dictatorship of the proletariat. It can only be eventually destroyed by the systematic development of the planned economy and total overcoming of the market.

Yet Blackburn rejects these measures and the legacy of Leninism in the Russian Revolution. In doing so he rejects the first significant step for a genuine transition from capitalist barbarism to socialism. ■

The first dust from the collapse of the Soviet Union had barely settled, when those who had predicted a New World Order fell silent. What was there to say? The New World Order looked very much like the pre-1914 world order – the same inter-imperialist rivalries, even the same unchecked national feuds of Central Europe. Far from seeing a new age of stability, dangerous tensions which were held in check during the Cold War have resurfaced. A poll taken in the USA showed that 68% thought that Japan was a serious threat, while only 22% thought the Soviet Union was. New enemies have replaced old ones.

In Part Two of this review of Paul Kennedy's The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers we chart the relative decline of the USA. Victor of the Cold War, unrivalled in military and industrial power, yet it is riven by colossal social and economic problems. It is the world's largest debtor nation and has a national debt of a staggering \$3,000 billion. Moreover, it faces strong economic rivals in Japan and a German-dominated Europe. Is it now, at the moment of its victory, in a position where it can impose its will throughout the world?

The Giant is Born

Between the end of the Civil War in 1865 and 1900 the US grew at unprecedented speed. Crude petroleum production rose from 3 million barrels in 1865 to 55 million in 1889. By 1914, a quarter of a million miles of railroad existed. Its national and per capita income dwarfed that of its nearest rival, Britain. 'It was in fact an entire rival continent and growing so fast that it was coming close to the point of overtaking all of Europe.' (p314)

This was accelerated when Europe engulfed itself in war. The Allies became dependent on US grain and financial aid: 'by next June, or earlier, the President of the American Republic would be in a position, if he wishes, to dictate his terms to us' warned the British Chancellor in 1916.

At the end of the war the USA was the world's greatest financial and creditor nation and the largest producer of manufactures and foodstuffs. Taking 100 as the starting point for manufacturing production in 1913, by 1920 Europe stood at 77 while the USA stood at 122. By 1929 the US was producing 4.5 million motor vehicles compared to Britain's 182,000. Its manufacturing output was larger than its nearest six rivals together. In the 1920s its own market absorbed much of its production and, seeing no immediate threat to American interests, arms expenditure was cut. The US did not play the role in world politics and diplomacy that its size and strength would have indicated. Though it has long overtaken Britain in terms of economic strength, it was Britain which played the major role of defending imperialist interests.

The collapse of world capitalist finance and the depression of the 1920s devastated world production and affected the US economy particularly badly. The USA retreated behind protectionist barriers. US GNP fell from \$98.4 billion in 1929 to barely half that in 1932. US exports fell from \$5.2 to \$1.6 billion. 15 million workers lost their jobs. Kennedy describes the consequence: 'American policy under

Hoover and especially under Roosevelt became even more introspective.' (p427) This bout of 'introspection' did not prevent the Roosevelt New Deal administration from playing its normal imperialist policing role in its own sphere of interest, refusing to recognise the liberal Grau San Martin regime in Cuba and sending 30 gunboats to its shores. They continued hostilities until a more right wing regime was installed.

On the European front, as the major powers moved towards conflict, US thinking seemed to have more to do with bitter memories of war debts not repaid, than any principle. In 1934 they banned loans to any foreign government which had defaulted on its war debts; in 1935 they announced an arms embargo in the event of war and the prohibition of loans to any belligerent power. Nevertheless the USA did well playing both ends against the middle. Whilst denouncing fascism, the US continued to arm both Germany and Italy, arms used to crush the democratic government of Spain; they enormously increased petrol supplies to Mussolini. In 1937 when Japan invaded China, the US continued to trade and supply arms. US actions led Chamberlain to say in 1937: 'It is always best and safest to count on nothing from the Americans but words.'

These are probably the last recorded anti-Americanisms of a British leader. An even more cynical summing up has come recently from US academics G Friedman and M Lebard in their book *The Coming War with Japan* (of which more later):

'the US was quite content to let Europe make war on itself until it began to appear as if one power, again Germany, might win. Then America intervened with just enough wealth and just enough force to prevent a German victory. Having intervened, the US refrained from active combat beyond the bare minimum required to keep the alliance intact until just before the German collapse. Then it introduced massive force and, suffering minimal casualties, reaped enormous rewards from victory.'



Japanese fascists honour their war dead

The Rise and Fall of Great Powers – Part 2

IMPERIALIST RIVALRIES – MUST THERE BE WAR?

When in 1941 the US joined the war, they brought with them productive potential that was capable of smothering Axis efforts. In 1943 the US produced 29,500 tanks compared to Germany's 17,800. In the same year the Allies produced 161,000 aircraft (of which 85,000 were US) compared to Germany's 24,000 and Japan's 16,000.

Pax Americana

The US emerged a colossus in 1945, 'the actual dimensions of its might were unprecedented in absolute terms' (p460). It possessed two thirds of the world's gold reserves; more than half of world manufacturing took place in the USA. It owned half the world's shipping. Its armed forces were enormous: 1,200 major warships ensured that it far outstripped Britain. The latter had agreed during the Second World War to cede control of its naval bases in the Western hemisphere to the USA, in return for desperately needed destroyers. The US also dominated the air: 2,000+ heavy bombers, 1,000 long-range B29s and also jet bombers. Most significantly it was a nuclear power and had ruthlessly used its new weapon both to crush Japan and demonstrate its fear-some potential. 'With the traditional Great Powers fading away, it steadily moved into the vacuum which their going created; having become number one, it could no longer contain itself within its own shores, or even its own hemisphere.'

The huge increase in production in the USA had both to find overseas markets and to ensure that it had unrestricted access to raw materials and areas for investment. There was to be a system of world free trade with the US as its major beneficiary. To secure its superprofits it erected bases across the world. 'As one American official put it, "It is now our turn to bat in Asia", and, he might have added, everywhere else as well.' They had little fear of competition from the defeated Japan and Germany whilst France and Britain were effectively dependent on US aid. British delusions of grandeur remained for decades, but the US became No 1 global policeman.

Only the Soviet Union remained a potent threat. Having borne the brunt of the war against fascism the Soviet Union had become a formidable military power, made extensive advances in Europe and become the political focus for millions fighting for democracy both in oppressed nations and the imperialist heartlands themselves. Not surprisingly it became the target of sustained US attack. The Truman Doctrine was born: US policy would be 'to help free people to maintain their institutions and integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes.' Henceforth the interests of US imperialism were to be advanced under the banner of 'world freedom'. The consequences were quickly felt in Greece, China, Malaya, Korea and Vietnam. US military expenditure began an astronomic rise from \$14bn in 1950 to \$49bn in 1953. By 1970 it had reached

\$77bn and the US had one million soldiers in 30 countries.

That it could sustain such expenditure was due to its dominant economic position. But that dominance was partly a result of the exhausted condition of its rivals. Both Europe and Japan recovered. Indeed the world saw an extraordinary growth of industrial output – between 1953 and 1973 output was comparable in volume to the entire previous 150 years. Most of this fantastic outpouring of wealth benefited the imperialist countries.

Relative Decline

The problems that the US would face became apparent in the 1960s. Kennedy charts the 'relative decline' of the US. Japan grew at over 10% per annum between 1953 and 1973. By the late 1970s its GNP was as large as that of France and the UK combined. Its productivity enabled it to penetrate deeply into US domestic and overseas markets. European economies grew at around 4.4% per year and their share of world industrial production grew from 39% to 48% between 1950 and 1970. The US began to lose its share of world wealth. Its share of world production fell from 25.9% in 1960 to 21.5% in 1980 while Japan's rose from 4.5% to 9% over the same period. The US trade balance went into deficit in 1971 for the first time since 1893 and by 1986 was \$160 billion.

The US government continued to increase its lavish spending on arms; by the 1980s arms spending was around 7% of its GNP per year. At the same time its economy underwent profound changes with a switch from productive to service sectors, increasing levels of overseas investment and continuing, often credit-financed, high levels of personal consumption. Its federal debt began its inexorable rise and could only be financed by borrowing overseas capital, particularly from Japan. The *Wall Street Journal* said in 1987:

'The US now sits in the bottom corner, where Britain was from 1926 to 1944. Such nations live on past credit, suck in foreign capital and can't save enough to finance domestic investment.'

Socially, despite its fabulous wealth, the US became a more divided society than ever. The number of millionaires grew fourteen times in the 1980s whilst in 1983, 15% of the population was below the official poverty line. The Reagan era saw social spending slashed.

One further significant change took place. 'American trade with Asia and the Pacific was only 48% of that with Europe in 1960, but had risen to 122%... by 1983 – a change which has been accompanied by a redistribution of both population and income within the US in the direction of the Pacific.'

Given all this it is not surprising that it is competition with Japan that should now be preoccupying the USA. In 1989 the US trade deficit with Japan was \$52bn. From the seventies onwards Japanese cars, textiles and steel began pushing US manufactures out of their own markets. Whilst the USA's major concern was the destruction



Protests against Japanese imports

of the Soviet Union, its relation with Japan was subordinated to this aim. Japan blocked Soviet access to the Pacific and acted as a supply depot and reserve plant for production of war materials for the USA. It thus played an important role in the Korean and Vietnamese wars. The US, in return, secured Japan's access to vitally needed raw materials, and Japan benefited mightily from free trade. With the Cold War role over, Japan no longer serves that function and tensions are growing fast. Hence a plethora of books about the Japanese threat, the best argued of which is *The Coming War with Japan*.

'From the American point of view the economic disadvantages of its relationship with Japan have come to far outweigh the political advantages as the Cold War ends. In this great reshuffling of its empire, the US expects Japan to accept American dominion... The US is attempting to solve its economic problems at the expense of Japan, using its politico-military power to compel Japan to accept the readjustment. It is easier to force Japan to limit its exports of cars to the US and increase its purchase of American cars than to increase the efficiency of Detroit.' (p401)

The authors believe that this conflict will lead to war:

'Intense economic competition coupled with geo-political insecurity caused World War I. The idea that the same forces can be kept in check in the 21st century by goodwill and careful negotiations is not really credible.' (p201)

Whilst not sharing the pessimistic determinism of these authors, it is clear that we are seeing the return of trade blocs, with the US having its North American Free Trade Zone, Europe its own internal market and Japan looking to its own trade zone in the Pacific. Moreover, as Kennedy points out, imperial powers, even in decline, do not simply give up and go home. Certainly these historic economic and political tensions have in the past led to imperialist wars. In the decades before such wars break out, the rest of the world generally suffers as it is divided up between the conflicting powers. Already we have seen the US use its power to impose its will in the Gulf. Tensions with Japan and Germany were evident during that war.

During the post-war period, the only force capable of staying the hand of the US was a broadly progressive one: the Soviet Union. In the 1990s the Soviet Union has been destroyed by other powers, imperialist powers are emerging whose interests may be different from those of the USA, but are equally reactionary. This century has been marked by almost continual warfare and the stink of bloodletting to come is in the air again. But we do not believe in predetermination. Human beings make their own history and they have the capacity to organise a world where justice and peace prevail. Only by linking the fight against imperialism and militarism in the imperialist countries and the oppressed nations can the way forward be found.

Maxine Williams

Whitemoor lockdown

NEWS ON FRAMED PRISONERS

KENNY CARTER

A campaign is being formed to fight for justice for Kenny Carter (see *FRFI* 104 and 105). The address is c/o 121 Railton Road, London SW2. Kenny himself has been moved to HMP Whitemoor, Longhill Road, March, Cambridgeshire.

KEVIN O'NEILL

Kevin was convicted in 1987 of a stabbing which he witnessed but took no part in. A confession was extorted from him by police who threatened to charge his pregnant girlfriend. She in turn made two statements clearly denying Kevin's involvement with the stabbing but was never called to court as a witness. Kevin was shown one of her statements and told it incriminated him; the police knew he was unable to read.

The judge directed the jury to discount the evidence of three witnesses who testified in Kevin's favour, but to heed that of a prisoner who claimed he had seen him re-enacting the crime. Although there was forensic evidence against the other two accused and not against Kevin, they were found guilty of ABH and given four years; Kevin got life for murder and the judge said he would get his 'tariff' in 17 years but should never think he might get out.

Kevin was Category A throughout his trial and still is. He was told informally several years ago that his file refers to a connection with the IRA. This is completely untrue and blatantly racist. In addition to being framed in the first place, Kevin is being punished by continued high security status both for his background (Scottish-born of Irish Catholic parents) and for the friendships he developed over the years with Irish prisoners.

Show your support for Kevin by writing to him at HMP Long Lartin, South Littleton, Evesham, Worcs, WR11 5TZ. For more information about the campaign to free Kevin write to Jenny O'Neill, c/o 27 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 4NY.

Prior to the strike, a tense power struggle was gaining momentum between prisoners and staff, its central dynamic fed by a determination on both sides to shape and determine the regime of a prison obviously designed as a prototype for long-term, dispersal prisons of the future. An enormous amount of money and expertise had been invested in Whitemoor as the ultimate word in control and containment, and both guards and management at the prison were determined to 'hold the line' against any attempt by prisoners to resist and fight back.

Prisoners' representative groups on C and D Wings had sought constantly to negotiate with the administration for prisoners' rights and a relaxation of the Whitemoor regime. They were met at every turn with prevarication and it soon became clear the administration was prepared to negotiate nothing and was simply using meetings with prisoners' representatives to extract information and 'clarify' existing rules and regulations.

Meanwhile the day to day struggle between prisoners and guards on the landings had produced a situation advantageous to the former. POA representatives claimed staff were 'losing control', and prior to 2 March opinion amongst guards strongly favoured a 'tough' response to the prisoners' demands for a more liberalised regime. An inexorable process of prisoner empowerment had begun at Whitemoor and both guards and governors were determined to crush it.

The strike began as a localised dispute between inmate kitchen workers and the administration over the question of pay. The administration refused point blank to negotiate with kitchen workers and threatened sackings and 'reallocation' of prisoners to workshops if the dispute continued. The kitchen workers responded with a call for solidarity from all other prisoners in the gaol and, by lunchtime on 2 March both C and D Wings 'came out' in support. Rapidly improvised strike committees were formed to respond to the organisational needs of the situation, and

On 2 and 3 March prisoners at Whitemoor staged a mass work strike in protest over oppressive conditions at the prison. The administration responded with a show of brute force, deploying riot squads against the prisoners and locking the prison down, providing clear evidence that as a blueprint for long-term prisons of the 1990s Whitemoor is basing its methods exclusively on control and repression. JOHN BOWDEN, a long-term prisoner, reports.

from the perspective of the administration it became apparent that the balance of institutional power was now shifting in favour of the prisoners.

On the second day prisoners on D Wing demanded a meeting with the head of 'inmate activities', Lynne Bowles, to discuss improvements to the regime generally, and despite her attempts to 'interview' prisoners individually about their grievances, a mass meeting was organised for that morning. Bowles agreed to 'review'

the existing regime and promised the prisoners that all their complaints would be 'carefully evaluated'. She then cut the meeting short and explained she was off to meet with the kitchen workers in an attempt to resolve their dispute. In fact, she met next with a Home Office official dispatched to the prison to oversee the breaking of the prisoners' strike. They agreed the prison should be locked down and the 'ringleaders' shipped out. Unaware of these machinations, the prisoners collected their

meals at lunchtime (cooked and served by guards) and allowed themselves to be locked in their cells for what they imagined would be the usual hour-long lunchtime lock-up. They remained locked up for the remainder of the day.

At tea time prisoners were unlocked individually to collect their meals and made to walk a gauntlet of screws in full riot-gear. They were also issued with a notice from assistant governor Kelly which said: 'You have chosen not to follow the order to comply with the requirements of the regime. The process you have chosen to voice your objection is not acceptable. In order to secure the safety of both prisoners and staff you will remain locked up. The situation will be kept under review.'

From 8.30pm onwards prisoners were removed from their cells by riot squads and taken to the segregation unit. A couple of dozen prisoners in all were removed in such a fashion, including the D Wing spokespeople. At about 2.30pm these prisoners, stripped of all their possessions, were bussed out to Lincoln and Pentonville. Whitemoor remained on lockdown and the administration smugly announced it had successfully nipped an incipient riot in the bud. Arriving at Pentonville during the early hours of the morning, one group of prisoners were informed by the governor that Whitemoor had 'won' and the same process would take place throughout the entire long-term prison system.

In fact, Whitemoor has lost, and lost quite demonstrably. Billed as a show-case at a cost of £89m and heralded as a liberal experiment in the containment and treatment of long-term prisoners, Whitemoor now replaces Albany as an end of the line hate-factory. For the prisoners who remain and those that replace the transferred 'ringleaders', the lesson of the March strike will have been learned: peaceful negotiation with such an administration is both futile and counter-productive.

In terms of how the Whitemoor strike was 'resolved', the Home Office can congratulate itself on having created the necessary conditions for a British Attica. ■

ROOF-TOP PROTEST AT PENTONVILLE



On 3 April Tim Sullivan, one of the former Whitemoor prisoners held in segregation at Pentonville, brought North London to a standstill when he scaled the prison roof in protest over the refusal to give him desperately needed dental treatment or indeed any painkillers to reduce his agony. Prison officers and police joined forces to close down Caledonian Road, reroute cars and buses, harass passers-by and generally over-react. Collective punishment was exacted on the rest of the prisoners with morning visitors turned away, no exercise and no tea or coffee during the afternoon visits. For Tim the protest was a complete success in that he drew substantial media attention to the abuses of human rights in Pentonville and other gaols and was given his operation on the next working day.

British justice - a scandal

It is fairly well known that a large number of prisoners in British gaols are there for crimes they did not commit. Less well-known are countless other ways in which prisoners are denied justice. We give here just two examples out of the many cases of blatant injustice.

ERIC OLDHAM was given a discretionary life sentence in 1970, for manslaughter. He was released in 1981 but recalled in 1983 for handling a stolen cheque book. After he complained he was re-released seven weeks later. In 1985 he was recalled for a second time following a row with his wife about her affair with another man. No charges or trial were involved. Since his recall, Eric has challenged the Home Office via the Appeal Courts and the European Commission. The Appeal Court was not prepared to get involved, but the European Commission ruled in his favour and said he must be given a hearing in a court. However, even for this the Home Office has decided he has to wait until October 1992 at the earliest. Such is the nature of the life sentence in this country. Life means life and even after release on licence, the licence may be revoked at any minute on any minor grounds.

ANTHONY STEVENSON was the victim of an unprovoked attack by two other prisoners, who came to his cell, asked him for drugs and when he said he had none, battered him with a table leg, a hammer and a knife. He was taken to an outside hospital to have his cheek, which was hanging open, stitched back together. There he was advised to seek recompense from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. He duly applied but was refused, not on the merits of his case but because written into the compensation scheme is a clause which specifically states that 'compensation may be withheld... on account of the applicant's character and way of life, as shown by his criminal convictions.' This applies as much to outside gaols as to inside: anyone with criminal convictions may be barred from receiving compensation. No other reason needs to be given.

Anthony is appealing to the CICB to overturn the decision in his particular case, citing character references to insist that a true picture of his 'way of life' cannot be ascertained from his criminal record alone. If he wins, it will be important that other prisoners start bringing similar claims which will be the first step to challenging this punitive law. ■

Storm as lags make shirts for jail demo

EXCLUSIVE

So ran the headline on a *Sun* article on 23 March. The 'lags' in question were prisoners of Hull Special Unit; the 'shirts' were some which read 'Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!' and others 'Hands off John Bowden! One-Off Prisoners' Support Group'; the 'jail demo' was in fact a picket of the Home Office on 25 March, organised by One-off, supported by *FRFI* and the Anarchist Black Cross, to highlight the transfers and treatment of prisoners from Whitemoor.

Although the POA branch chairman quickly



Paul Ross and Andrzy Jakubczyk display some of the fruits of their labours

condemned the 'display of political bias' the most that could be elicited from the Unit governor by the combined efforts of *The Sun*, *Yorkshire Post*, *Hull Daily Mail*, local TV and radio was: 'This is a far better way for inmates to put opinions than hitting someone on the head.'

T-shirt and picket publicity has certainly helped John Bowden who was visited by Home Office official John Duvall at the height of the furore to be informed he would not, as previously threatened, be sent to Albany but back to Maidstone, from where he was moved

on petty disciplinary charges to Gartree and then Whitemoor six months ago!

The silk-screen facility is still operational at the Special Unit. Less controversial T-shirts have also been produced for MIND and the Prisoners' Advice Service. Any organisation or campaign wishing to use the service should contact Paul and Jacko at HMP Hull (A Wing), Hedon Road, Hull, HU9 5LS. The work is done free but you may be asked to provide the T-shirts and a small donation towards the cost of the printing ink.

Strangeways: the forgotten trial

As we go to press the verdict has just been given for four out of the eight men on trial for their part in the 1990 Strangeways uprising. Paul Taylor and John Spencer have been found guilty of riot; Alan Lord and Andy Nelson, not guilty. In March murder charges were dropped against Alan, Paul, Andy and two others. The remaining verdicts are due shortly. NICKI JAMESON reports.

The trial has been held in virtual secrecy in a specially refurbished courtroom with a glassed-in dock with a roof which prevents the defendants being seen from the public gallery. They have spent every weekday night for the last four months in windowless police cells beneath the court.

The dropping of the murder charge was wonderful news – but did anybody know about it? Did banner headlines scream 'Strangeways protesters innocent!' 'Final murder count – zero!' No, of course they didn't. The press, both tabloid and so-called 'quality' was silent.

The journalists who gave us '20 dead', '30 dead', 'sex-offenders emasculated and thrown over landings' had nothing to say. The same journalists who heralded the start of the trial with quotes from prosecution witnesses who feared the 'wild animals' in the dock would kill them in their orgy of violence, were silent. Suddenly the wild animals were no longer wild, the murderers and torturers were innocent and it wasn't 'news' any more.

The following letter was sent to *The Guardian* and *The Independent* but printed by neither.

Dear Sir

Why only one column inch to announce that the murder charge against five Strangeways prisoners involved in the 1990 revolt was withdrawn by the prosecution?

In 1989 54 prisoners at Risley Remand Centre took over the gaol and held the roof for three days. Their protest was against the unrelenting squalor of their conditions and the gratuitous brutality of their gaolers. After a six-month-long trial they were acquitted of riot. The jury, which toured the prison, believed that these men's situation left them no option but to force their plight into the public eye by direct means. Sympathetic media coverage of the verdict enhanced this view.

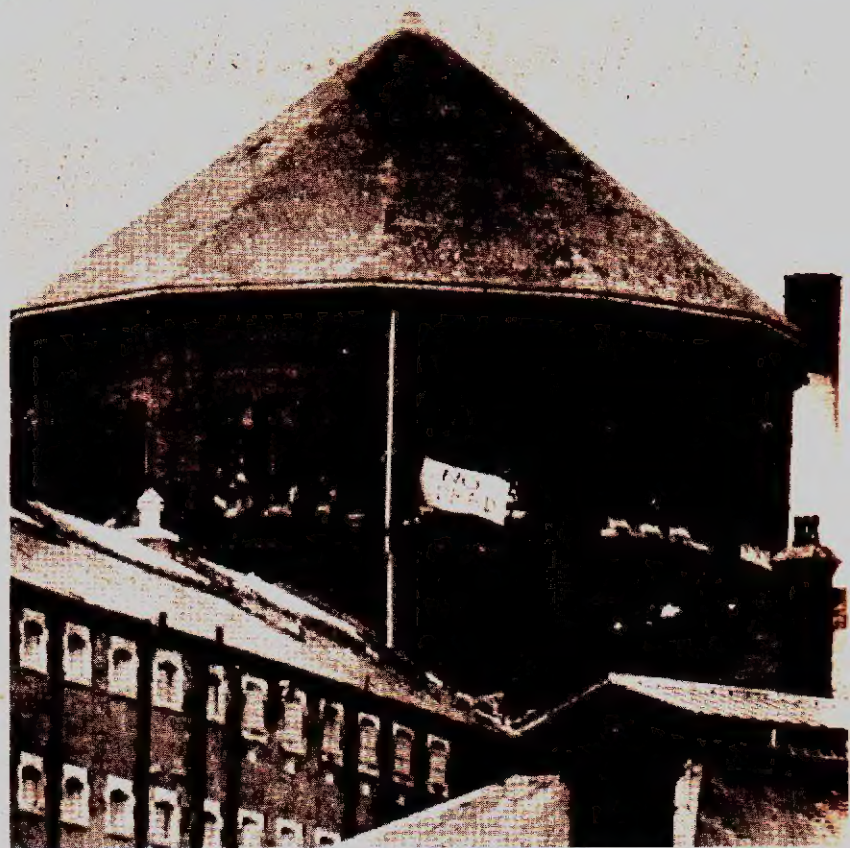
In April 1990 prisons again hit the news. At the end of a month which saw riots in gaols across the country and a 25-day rooftop protest at Strangeways, even the most ardent 'hang 'em and flog 'em' merchants were talking about the need to improve prison conditions.

The results of Strangeways were on the one hand the Woolf Inquiry – a thorough investigation of the whole system, culminating in a report full of recommendations for humanising Britain's inhuman prisons; on the other hand revenge on those who had forced the debate on to the

agenda in the first place – a new law of prison mutiny and an attempt to criminalise and discredit the protesters, particularly by pinning a murder charge for the unfortunate death of Derek White onto two of the most prominent figures, Paul Taylor and Alan Lord. That attempt failed but the public could be forgiven for not knowing about it. If gutter press headlines of 1990 – '20 dead', 'wild animals on rampage' etc are remembered and that the 'murderers' were in fact innocent is forgotten the state will have its revenge after all and the prison reform debate will once again marginalise those people who should be at the centre of such a discussion – the prisoners.

Yours faithfully
Nicki Jameson

Now the trial is over and at least two men have been acquitted of all charges, we must proclaim far and wide that there were no murders at Strangeways, that, as we have always said, the uprising was a totally justified response to the atrocious conditions and brutality of British prisons. The 'not guilty's vindicate the revolt; FRFI congratulates Alan and Andy, and our support remains firm for all who took part in the protest, no matter what the court verdicts may be. ■



The message of the prisoners and their supporters was totally ignored by the press



POWs' birthdays

Eddie Butler 338637 17 April, HMP Frankland, Finchale Avenue, Brasside, Durham DH1 5YD
Patrick McLaughlin LB83694 2 May, HMP Whitemoor, Longhill Road, March, Cambridge PE15 QPR
Joe O'Connell 338635 15 May, HMP Parkhurst, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 5NX

Special hospitals exposed

There are currently 1,700 'patients' in 'special hospitals for dangerous offenders'. They are housed in Broadmoor, Ashworth and Rampton. Conditions are akin to prison. The fact that the POA is the primary union representing nursing staff speaks volumes about the standards of care a patient can expect to receive. LORNA REID reports.

The POA has never attempted to hide its desire that special hospitals be run along prison lines, quoting the need for top security as their reasoning. But behind the arguments for security measures, the 'hospitals' have become notorious for running brutal, degrading regimes which prefer punishment and drugging to medical care as a response to the patients' needs.

Black people and women are grossly over-represented in the 'special hospital' population. Orville Blackwood, the third young black person to die in Broadmoor since 1984, was detained there in 1987 during a four-year sentence for armed robbery involving a toy gun. In 1990, on release, he was detained further under the Mental Health Act. Orville's mother claims 12 members of staff, including a doctor, were involved in forcibly sedating him.

Two earlier deaths were Michael Martin and Joe Watts. Michael Martin choked on his vomit after being in-

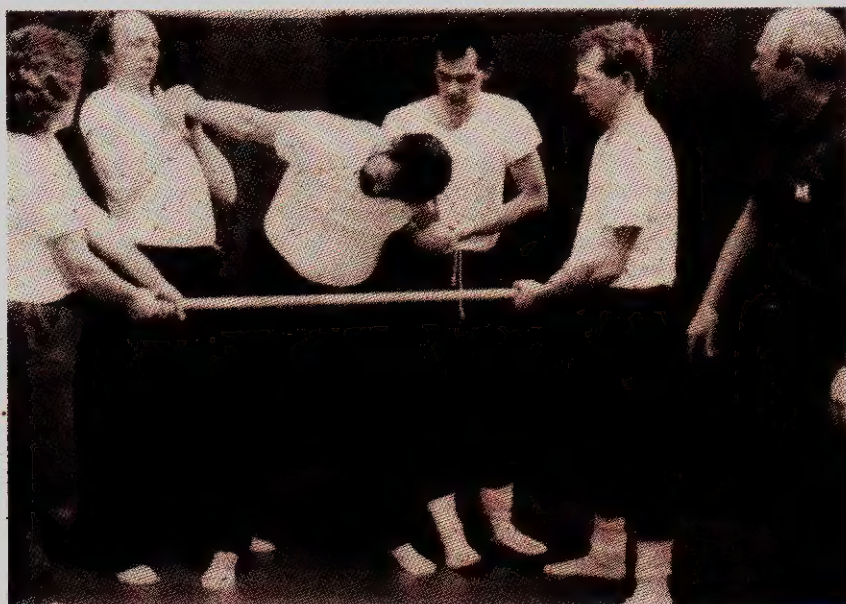
jected with tranquilisers and left alone in a seclusion room – the inquest recorded a verdict of accidental death aggravated by lack of care. Joe Watts was also left alone after being sedated with twice his usual dose of Largactyl. The hospital claimed he had thrown himself at six nurses wearing riot helmets and carrying riot shields.

The Public Inquiry into allegations of brutality at Ashworth is currently under way. Over 600 complaints of brutality have been lodged over a 10-year period. The Inquiry began with the case of Sean Walton, aged 20, who died in a locked security room 16 hours after being beaten on the head with a snooker cue by a member of staff and then being sedated with a double dose of pimozide, an anti-psychotic drug. The cremation

of Sean's body, before a public analyst's report on samples from the body had been completed, held up the beginning of the Inquiry and was described by the investigators as 'extraordinary'.

Other allegations include:

- A patient with brain damage recounted how staff used to pull out the waistband of his trousers and drop their cigarette ash inside.
- A nurse boasted how he had submerged a patient's head in the kitchen sink while he was washing up, to test his breaking point.
- Patients complained of nurses calling them abusive names such as 'wops', 'low grades', 'high grades', 'mess pots', 'slags', 'beasts', and 'nig'.
- Staff joked with patients about



Prison officers learn the gentle art of control and restraint: would you trust nurses with this skill?

'measuring them up for coffins'.

The POA is denying all the allegations against its members. However, it is not only patients who have levelled complaints at the POA; complaints have been received from psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and social workers who witnessed the abusive behaviour.

The POA is not a workers' union. It acts as a wing of the state. Its own interests are clearly separate from those of the prisoners it locks up in gaols and the 'patients' it abuses in special hospitals. It is notorious for harbouring amongst its ranks sympathisers

DAVID SHARATT

'On 24 February 1972 a man was stabbed to death. I was arrested and admitted the crime and showed detectives the place where the murder happened. This is the only evidence which convicted me. Due to my mental illness at the time I would have said anything. I thought it was great being a murderer. The trouble is that I am not sick now. I regret what I told the cops. It was only right that they would charge me. So here I am 20 years on protesting my innocence to no avail.'

'I have spent 15 years in prison and six years here. I have a lot of contempt for my gaolers. For 16 years I was in a children's home; then I was moved to a mental home, then a mental hospital, then prison and here for this crime.'

and members of the National Front. The racism and sexism of many of its members are well documented.

An official survey has found more than half the 1,700 patients in 'special hospitals for dangerous offenders' should not be there at all. Up to 800 patients have received all the treatment which could benefit them but no other establishment is able or willing to accommodate them. In the meantime there are at least 300 mentally ill prisoners in gaol who require intensive medical treatment but cannot be accepted into special hospitals for lack of beds.

The Commission for Racial Equality has launched an investigation into

the experience of black people at the hands of the mental health services, including why so many end up in special hospitals. The incidence of diagnosis of schizophrenia is believed to be up to seven times higher among people born in the Caribbean and second generation Afro-Caribbeans aged 16-29 are 16 times more likely to be diagnosed schizophrenic than their white contemporaries. One in five patients at Broadmoor is Afro-Caribbean and one in three of these is held on high security wards.

Women make up a low percentage of the prison population, yet about one in five people in special hospitals are women. Over the past five years, one in six women admitted to special hospitals was aged 20 or under. Women spend longer in special hospitals than men. They are expected to conform to traditional female roles before they are considered to have improved their overall behaviour. Many women have complained of being forcibly strip-searched by male nurses.

Unlike prisoners in mainstream gaols, most patients in special hospitals have little opportunity to organise or build solidarity with each other. They remain forgotten at the heart of Britain's rotten judicial and mental health system. Patients in special hospitals are entitled to democratic rights, to be able to live free from brutality and humiliation and to have a say in what drugs they are prescribed. All those who are not or no longer mentally ill should be released and provided with care and support. Mental hospitals should not be used as a dumping ground for subversive prisoners whilst those prisoners who are mentally ill must have the right to treatment in a hospital not incarceration in a prison. The years of secrecy must end and special hospitals be opened up to public scrutiny. Above all the POA must be forced out. If these places are to function as hospitals and not as gaols, they must be staffed by nurses whose primary duty is care, not prison officers whose first concern is control.

GEOFFREY HAYES

'These places should be exposed for what they are. Drugs are being used as mental torture. I know of one suicide which took place because he could no longer put up with the side effects of the drugs he was forced to take. Two independent doctors who saw me both said I was not suffering from mental illness yet I continue to be detained on medical evidence which has been discredited. Cases of brutality, ill treatment, improper care, abuse of the Mental Health Act and violations of human rights are the order of the day here, and Rampton and Broadmoor are just the same.'

■ They've shot the President!

A review of Oliver Stone's film *JFK*

Since the day President Kennedy was murdered, there have been over six hundred books and a multitude of theories on the assassination and its possible perpetrators.

No one individual will probably ever unravel the events leading up to that fateful afternoon in Dallas. For one thing, 23 out of 24 vital witnesses died prematurely within eight years of the assassination. For another, the conspiracy (and the House Assassinations Committee admitted in 1979 that there must have been a conspiracy) seems to have been constructed in such a way that not even the highest officials were given the whole story.

Aided by an excellent cast, Oliver Stone has set about reconstructing what has come to be seen as the most likely version of events; and points to almost all of the 'inconsistencies' in the official Warren Commission version.

In his view, the assassination was the ultimate *coup d'état*: planned and carried out by the CIA in order to maintain their own power in the face of proposed Presidential cuts and to ensure the continuation of a war in Vietnam that ultimately kept the US arms manufacturers going through potentially lean years.

Stone obviously fell for the Kennedy Myth, and the film portrays a

knightly President out to save the world. This portrayal overlooks Kennedy's clear faults. However, Stone clearly believes that, had he lived, Kennedy would almost certainly have withdrawn US troops from Vietnam, strengthened relations with both Krushchev and Castro, continued to pass controversial Civil Rights legislation, drastically cut defence spending and curbed the powers of the Intelligence Services.

This meant that Kennedy, though popular with the electorate, was far from popular with the real power in the US: Big Business barons, organised crime syndicates, Intelligence and the military who, as more and more evidence suggests, decided that he must be eliminated.

This is the hardest part of events for the US public to accept: that the powers could and actually did order the assassination of the country's 'democratically elected' President. No matter how much evidence might point to it, to accept such a conclusion would have plunged the country into instability.

Polls show that a minority of US citizens now believe that the alleged killer, Lee Harvey Oswald, was the sole assassin. Evidence increasingly points not only to Oswald not being the 'lone assassin', but that he almost certainly never fired a shot; had been trained by Intelligence Services since he joined the US Airforce; and had

been set up to believe he was stationed in Dallas by the CIA in order somehow to prevent the assassination.

Most of this is brought out in the film, but Stone is better at barraging the viewer with a host of possibilities than at analysing them. Certainly, the film is not short of cliché and over-emphasis. But maybe it takes a heavy-handed director such as Stone to force such a disturbing film upon the US moviegoer. As Norman Mailer said in a recent article in *Vanity Fair*:

'It is a crude movie driven home with strong colours and heavy strokes as indeed all [Stone's] films have been... All the same, he has the integrity of a brute, he forges where others will not go, and the result is that we live for three hours in the ongoing obsession of our national lives.'



Psychiatrist R D Laing said that anyone who learns of their partner's infidelity after many years of complete trust suffers such an unbalancing of the mind that, in order to retain their sanity, they would rather deny facts that to anyone else would be irrefutable. So it was with the people of the USA.

And the evidence really was irrefutable. The following is a brief list of inconsistencies glossed over by the Warren Commission: 92 witnesses said they heard shots coming from the grassy knoll but their testimony was not recorded: there were 33 people (mostly from the Intelligence Services) in the crowded operating theatre where what was surely one of the most important autopsies ever was carried out by two semi-retired desk-bound Naval doctors; no official post-mortem was carried out; the President's brain and internal organs were removed to the National Archives, from which they were later removed without trace; there was no

security coverage of the motorcade and there was terrible interference with all police radios during the assassination; a Mafia hitman and friend of Jack Ruby's was picked up right afterwards near the 'grassy knoll', but was immediately released; a description of the assassin that matched Lee Harvey Oswald almost exactly was issued less than an hour after the killing, at which time there was almost no evidence to suggest he was guilty, and no records were kept of his interrogations in police custody... and so on.

Stone proves himself master of the crowded set-piece recreation. At the moment of assassination, for instance, he juxtaposes b & w and colour, newsreel footage, home movies and newly-filmed segments in such a way that the viewer is never quite sure what is real and what is fiction.

Oliver Stone, for all his failings, has been swimming against the tide in the US, transforming himself into its successful conscience with films such as *Wall Street*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Salvador* and now *JFK*. The Kennedy assassination has implications as relevant today as they were almost 30 years ago. The US public chose to ignore facts about their governing bodies that were staring them in the face then: if presenting the facts to them again so graphically alters their attitude even slightly, then Stone, despite his continued allegiance to many bourgeois Hollywood attitudes, is to be congratulated. ■

William Highbury

■ War on children



Brazil: War on Children Gilberto Dimenstein with an introduction by Jan Rocha, Latin American Bureau, 1991 pbk, 88pp, £4.99.

This book and its excellent introduction show that the war against millions of working class children in Brazil ends for thousands with torture and murder by death squads on the city streets.

In Brazil 25 million children live in abject poverty; of these, 8 million are on the streets. Diarrhoea is the biggest killer of children under two. Millions live and die in shanty towns, *favelas*, built over sewers, under motorway arches and bridges. Here disease and semi-starvation are rife. EC and World Bank projects employ 12-year-old boys who work ten hours a day making charcoal. Two thousand children exist in slave conditions in Brazil's sugar-cane fields.

From the *favelas* children as young as eight gravitate to the cities. Here, as journalist Gilberto Dimenstein uncovers, their chances of survival are brutally curtailed.

Branded by the media as 'criminals' with less right to live than rats, street children have been made acceptable targets of the death squads. Consisting of police, shop-keepers and 'guardian angels' (middle-class people trained in martial arts), these

squads have set themselves the task of murdering 'juvenile delinquents', 'cleaning up the streets' to make them 'safe'. They receive support from politicians anxious to win middle class votes, and they boast of the numbers they murder.

From January to July 1989 in Rio de Janeiro alone, 184 children and adolescents were murdered. Conservative estimates reckon that out of every 100 children 'who are victims of a violent death, 33 are killed by the death squads'.

Dimenstein interviews children who have been beaten and tortured by police. He exposes the rape of young girls and boys by the squads who then murder them; the burnings and castrations, the slashing with knives and use of shotguns to disfigure children's faces before murdering them.

But there is resistance. The National Movement of Street Children, to whom this book is dedicated, and others work to expose the atrocities. One 16-year-old told Dimenstein, 'I am no longer afraid of denouncing the police who torture street children. They can beat me up, kill me, but I will carry on denouncing them.' ■

Alexa Byrne

■ Map of Britain's poverty

No political party represents the interests of the poor in Britain. They are not the marginal voters who determine the outcome of elections. Yet their numbers are rapidly growing.

Capitalism produces and reproduces inequality. At one end a minority of rich people become richer; at the other end greater numbers of people become poorer. The last 13 years of Tory governments strikingly portray this process. The facts and figures are gathered together in a short pamphlet, *Poor Britain* (Low Pay Unit pamphlet 56, unfortunately £10 for a mere 12 pages).

There were 50 million Europeans living in poverty in the mid-1980s: more than one-fifth of them, 10.3 million including 2.6 million children, lived in the UK. The gap between rich and poor widened in the 1980s. The real income of the poorest 20 per cent fell from £3,442 to £3,282 between 1979 and 1989, while that of the top 20 per cent increased from £20,138 to £28,124. The rich/poor gap widened by an additional £8,146.

The number of families with incomes below the supplementary benefit/income support level increased by 18 per cent between 1979 and 1987. The number of individuals affected rose even faster. Including children, there were more than twice as many people on an income below the poverty line than in 1979. By 1987 more than a third of the UK population were living in poverty or on its margins, up 50 per cent on 1979. Changes in the social security system contributed a great deal to this rise.

Income tax cuts worth nearly £29 billion were made between 1979-1991. About one-third went to the top 1.4 per cent of taxpayers earning above £50,000 a year, a cut of £421 a week, while one-fiftyseventh went to taxpayers earning £5000 a year or less, a fall of £2.50 a week. Overall taxes, including VAT and the poll tax, have risen since 1979 from 34.7 per cent of national income to over 37 per cent. As a result only those earning one-and-a-half times the average

have seen a reduction in tax burden.

The wealth gap has also widened. While the top ten per cent have increased their share of marketable wealth from 50 per cent to 53 per cent between 1980 and 1989, the bottom 50 per cent have seen their share fall from 9 per cent to 6 per cent.

10 million workers in Britain earn less than the Council of Europe's decency threshold of £193.60 per week, £5.15 per hour - 47 per cent of those in employment. In 1979 the number was 7,800,000. Another million part-time workers should be added to this. Their earnings are so low that they do not appear in official statistics.

The gap between the highest and lowest paid is greater than in Victorian times. For male manual workers the ratio of the lowest 10 per cent to the highest 10 per cent rose from 1:2.1 in 1986 to 1:2.5 today. For non-manual male workers the differential today is 1:3.4.

Discrimination against women means that over 6 million women make up two-thirds of Britain's low paid, earning less than the decency threshold. 51.6 per cent of all women working full-time and 78.8 per cent of

those working part-time earn less than the threshold. For full time employees over 18 gross weekly earnings of women were 78.3 per cent of men's in 1991. If overtime earnings are included the figure falls to 70.1 per cent.

Racism is endemic to the capitalist system. Statistics are not collected nationally, but the Policy Studies Institute found in 1982 that black men earned on average 85 per cent of white male pay. A study in London in 1986 confirmed this figure and found also that black female pay was 82 per cent of white female pay. A study in Leicester showed Asian male pay to be 83 per cent of white male pay and Asian female pay to be 84 per cent of white female pay.

Over 70 per cent of young people earn low pay and their position has worsened since 1979. In 1979 under 18 year olds earned 42.2 per cent of average weekly earnings of all aged 21 and over. In 1991 this was 37.4 per cent. The equivalent figures for 18-20 year olds were 60.8 per cent in 1979 and 53.3 per cent in 1991.

Finally the pay gap between different regions has widened. Taking the UK average as 100, Greater London increased from 114.4 in 1979 to 126.8 in 1991. The rest of the South East rose from 100.5 to 103.7. In contrast the North fell from 97.9 to 90.1. Yorks and Humbs from 97.0 to 90.1. W Midlands from 96.9 to 91.2. Wales from 96.5 to 88.6 and Scotland from 99.0 to 93.2. However wage inequalities within regions are more pronounced in Greater London. The top tenth of male non-manual workers earn 6.7 times the earnings of the bottom tenth of women manual workers. The figures for the other regions rise from 5.7 in the rest of the South East and Scotland to 5.0 for Wales.

This short pamphlet is a clear indictment of the capitalist system. We are to be grateful that such publications are still being produced in spite of frequent government attempts to distort, disguise and often simply not produce the relevant statistics. ■

David Ree



East End sweatshop workers

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OBITUARY

Debby Hall - a fighter remembered

Debby Hall died tragically in a road accident on 13 March. The RCG remembers her with great respect for her contribution to the struggles against apartheid and the Poll Tax.

The last time I saw Debby she was being thrown out of a courtroom at Highbury. The magistrate who had sat week after week on Poll Tax hearings while Debby acted as a McKenzie's friend, providing people fighting summonses with the courage to confront the court, had had enough of her. Enraged that the previous week Debby herself had been a defendant and had consequently not been restricted to receiving advice but had been able to address the court directly,



the magistrate banished her to the public gallery from where she communicated with the defendants by copious notes, delivered surreptitiously by myself and others.

Debby was training to be a solicitor. This was the result not of

personal ambition but of years of political campaigning in which her knowledge of the legal system had become an invaluable weapon. Many RCG members remember being bailed out of police stations by Debby after arrests on the Non-Stop Picket of the South African Embassy.

Debby had a regular shift on the picket and had been a City AA member since 1985 when she was arrested herself in the campaign to win back the right to demonstrate directly outside the gates of the Embassy.

Debby's funeral was attended by over 300 people who came to mourn her death and celebrate her life. Her sister Ruth spoke in tribute, recalling that Debby was a gifted violinist and played with the National Youth Orchestra, but chose not to follow the life of a professional musician, dedicating herself instead to ceaseless political activity. From anti-

Vietnam war campaigning aged 14, Debby went on to organise in solidarity with Palestine, against nuclear weapons, in defence of the NHS and ILEA.

The day before the funeral Debby's two daughters attended the day-long picket of the South African Embassy accompanied by many other of her friends and comrades, fulfilling the pledge their mother had given City Group to be there on that day in protest against the whites-only referendum.

Camden Anti-Poll Tax activists have set up a fund to commemorate Debby's life and her immeasurable contribution to their struggle. Money collected will be used to pay legal costs for people fighting cases against the Poll Tax. Donations can be sent to **The Debby Hall Memorial Fund**, c/o 30a Carlingford Road, NW3 1RX. ■

Nicki Rensten

LETTERS Write to FRFI BCM Box 5909, London, WC1N 3XX

Support for Cuba

I think that your campaign in support of Cuba, that communist pearl in the Caribbean, is very worthy indeed. The workers and peasants of Cuba have suffered years of interference in their internal affairs from the CIA; the effects of the US blockade on the Cuban economy have brought untold harm on the Cuban people.

The policies pursued by a succession of right-wing Labour and Tory governments mean that I am one of many people who cannot find work (I used to work as a farm labourer in Hampshire, but conditions were hard and I didn't earn very much). However, I have sent a donation to help send much-needed items out to Cuba.

Keep up your coverage of Cuba and other struggles; the Palestinian struggle against the brutality of the Israeli state (which is also backed by US dollars), the struggle against apartheid and for an elected, legitimate government that really represents the black majority. **AHH KNOTT** Margate, Kent

Three-House Jack

You go out of a theatre in London and you fall over homeless people. This kind of comment one would expect to be made by an extortionately-paid, multi-home owning hypocrite and definitely not by a socialist. Well, one would be right. It was made by the Labour MP for Blackburn, Jack Straw, at his main election meeting. 'Election meeting' was the media title given to this farce. A more fitting description would be the local clown jamboree, the room being over-decorated in bright colourful bunting complete with helium-filled balloons tied to the chairs and, to complement it all, an awe-struck audience of party faithful.

Many of whom were abundantly covered in rosettes, loud stickers and red noses - sorry, I meant red roses. This happy gathering flapped and cheered frantically whenever the chief clown spoke.

Three-House Jack, chief clown, supporting a permanently exaggerated smile (not theatre make-up), entertained the duped onlookers for a staggering 15 minutes. He told of the present government's neglect of the workers, pensioners and homeless, but he offered no serious solutions, only half-baked promises that all this wrong would miraculously be put right when Labour is in power. As the chief clown sat down and the euphoric, foot-stamping crowd calmed, I rose to ask him a question: 'Mr Straw, why are you

only raising the single pension £5, when to restore it to its 1979 value would need an increase of £14?'

The mood changed instantly. I was suddenly surrounded by five large clowns, the non-smiling type, ordering me to be quiet and to leave at once. The clown chairing this sham was frantically shouting 'No questions! No questions!' I asked what had happened to free speech? At this unthinkable suggestion the Fearless Five grabbed me and started to pull in all directions. I managed to stand on a chair and vocally challenged Straw on how he could express concern for the homeless when he at present owns three homes. The obnoxious smile disappeared and he went as red as his rose. Several in the

Solidarity from Norway

I am very pleased with **FRFI**'s coverage of events in Britain and abroad - I think that your articles on the Gulf War and the break-up of the socialist bloc have been particularly good.

Some of the problems you have in Britain we have in Norway on a smaller scale: the destruction of the welfare state and the inability of the social democratic party to prevent that (unemployment is now 200,000 and rising, in a population of 4m, health services

are breaking down, more and more people end up in debt and near-poverty). There is a growing racism which is fuelled by state policy: strict immigration controls, police harassment, expulsions etc.

The tendency is the same all over Scandinavia; no doubt you have heard of the International Socialist member who was blown to bits when a letter bomb exploded in their office in Copenhagen a few weeks ago, a bomb which was probably sent from Norway or Sweden. I agree with you that anti-racist work is an essential strategy in the building of socialism in Europe.

The latest event has been the Turkish occupation of the Turkish embassy in Oslo; after the latest brutal attacks on and murder of Kurds in Turkey, some 30 people managed to storm the embassy here and totally wreck it. These demonstrators have been systematically treated as criminals by the police and the courts, arrested for 4 weeks with no visits or communication with their families and friends. All signs of sympathy and support have been similarly criminalised.

The Labour foreign minister immediately apologised to the ambassador and promised better protection in the future to prevent

similar incidents, without mentioning the criminal and terroristic policy of the Turkish government towards the Kurds in their own (NATO) country. It should not be forgotten that this Labour government gave perhaps the most consistent support for US policy in the Gulf war.

I enclose £88 towards your forthcoming publications, to renew my subscription to **FRFI** and to contribute to the publication drive.

NORWEGIAN SOCIALIST Oslo, Norway

Scottish nationalism

Mike Taylor's article on Scottish independence in your Election issue is a tired and timeless argument, in that it raises the old - and phony - spectre of Scottish racism towards the English and the bourgeois character of the most vocal protagonists of an independence movement.

No one can doubt the bourgeois credentials of the SNP. But a newspaper like **FRFI** cannot apply conditions to the nationalist aspirations of Scottish people that it would not apply to other nationalist movements in the world. There are precious few pro-democracy nationalist movements which are led by a revolutionary vanguard, yet you do not withhold your support for their demands. I suspect you raise the spectre of anti-English racism to justify your hostility to Scottish nationalism on the grounds that it



Jim Sillars, SNP member and anti-abortion campaigner

is devoid of democratic content.

The most suspect of your arguments, however, is your demand that the interests of the Scottish working class rest in uniting with the English and Welsh working class. Why should

we wait for the potential birth of a movement from a class - be it in Merseyside or Cardiff - that has shown itself to be as incapable as the Scottish working class of defending itself against Tory and Labour attacks?

Historically, the Scottish working class has played a vanguard role in the struggle against capitalism - standing alongside the English and Welsh working class. The solidarity has not been reciprocated. Why did Scotland have to fight alone for a year when it clearly would have been in the interests of the English and Welsh working class to destroy the Poll Tax at birth?

For communists, the upsurge of Scottish nationalism should be welcomed. Far from being a media-inspired movement it has captured the imagination of the young; they may not be marching, but then where, in today's political climate, are the young marching? Merseyside? Cardiff? Scottish nationalism is a

challenge to the reactionary and imperialist concept of the union of Great Britain, and to Labourism, which pays lip service to the interests of the working class and quashes their aspirations. Most importantly of all, a massive nationalist vote in Scotland will open up the way for democratic change in Britain as a whole.

An independent Scotland tomorrow will be capitalist. That is a simplistic and devious argument. A working class in struggle, if it is serious about its future, will fight for its interests independent from its ruling class. Scottish nationalism opens up a pathway for the Scottish working class to mount a new challenge to Westminster's politics of poverty, unemployment and racism.

The working class of England and Wales are welcome to join us in our struggle. But don't expect us to ask permission to go it alone. **LORNA REID** South London

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Fraud and its reward



Peter Clowes

Piracy, gangsterism, embezzlement were always on the frontiers of expanding capitalism. Their definition as 'crimes' only indicated that a group of competing capitals had gained ascendancy over the others and sought to secure their position. With the prospect of another five years of Tory rule, the City looks forward to renewed fraudulent dealing. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

In the history of the City of London, statutory law and financial regulation have served to ensure the submission of smaller capitals for deployment by their multi-millionaire masters. Unregulated competition generates such uncertainty that smaller capitals might withdraw from fear of not only losing any part in the share-out of profits, but actually having to bear losses.

Nevertheless, when the prospects of fortunes far exceeding the customary are presented, the City doyens remember their naked instinct for competition and greed; that restless appetite without which capital would never have advanced so spectacularly, and they forgive their younger aspirants whose enthusiasms draw them beyond the strictly legal. Thus a string of fraud cases arising from the Thatcher years when the City was drunk with money have resulted in the most brazen pardonings of obvious crooks.

However, there is a point of excess and hence transgression: it is reached when minnows are gutted to no good effect for the sharks, when smaller capitals are destroyed and wasted instead of being devoured by larger capitals. At this point the City institutions intervene to reimpose large capitals' order on the chaos. This is usually done discreetly, provided the status quo is accepted.

In the current context, there is the further dimension of boom suddenly turning to bust. Then the City has to apportion not profits but losses. If each player in the market accepts its position and bears its losses, then little if anything will be heard of crime in the City; but if, amid the greed and chaos, the balance between capitals has been unsettled, even challenged, then the cry of 'fraud' will go up in the City itself until the fight over who carries the losses is settled.

Today, British capital employs fewer than five million people in manufacture. Manufacturing output is falling. Profit increasingly takes a parasitic form: interest, currency exchange deals and the manipulation of financial assets. Fraud is an extension of these methods of securing a share of surplus value and is invaluable to the British bourgeoisie.

The cases of Guinness, Blue Arrow

and Barlow Clowes reveal the anarchy prevailing at the heart of British capital and what a mockery money makes of any principle of law. People are fined and imprisoned for not paying their Poll Tax. City slickers, even when convicted, are more likely to go free and receive fortunes in costs.

Guinness

August 1990 Mr Justice Henry sentenced Ernest Saunders to five years' imprisonment; Gerald Ronson was sent down for a year and fined a record £5m; Sir Jack Lyons was fined £3m but was spared gaol because of his illness and age. Lyons was stripped of his knighthood. They were part of an insider dealing network masterminded by Saunders to beat Argyll in a £2.7 billion bid for Distillers company. Some £270m worth of Guinness shares were bought through illegal operations at a cost of £25m in bribes during 1985-86.

Saunders had been convicted on 24 counts of theft, false accounting and breaches of the Companies Act. He was released from Ford Open Prison in June 1991 after serving nine months of a five-year sentence reduced to two years six months on appeal. Saunders recollects Ford as a cross between boarding school and national service, and every time interest rates went up, inmates would 'gleefully shout things like "that's another £600,000!"'. The early release is attributed to a degenerative brain condition from which there is normally no recovery. However, an apparently *compos mentis* and certainly free Saunders says that medical opinion is now divided over whether he actually had Alzheimer's disease or whether it was the cocktail of tranquilizers and sleeping pills he had been taking. Either way, 'Pure Genius', 'Deadly Ernest' as he was dubbed in the City, is back scanning the markets again.

11 February 1992 Mr Justice Henry dismissed the jury in the Guinness II trial. Defendant Roger Seelig, a former merchant banker with Morgan Grenfell, was described by the judge as possibly likely to do something 'irrevocable' if the trial proceeded. Seelig, charged with attempted fraud, two charges of false account-

ing, and conspiracy to defraud, had been 'diagnosed' as suffering from severe depression and anxiety by two psychiatrists. Despite being a millionaire, Seelig was conducting his own defence. With a somewhat benign reversal of Catch-22, Seelig explains his predicament: 'There is nothing mentally wrong with me. I can think rationally and rationally I had to conclude that to continue to defend myself for several more months - maybe another year - was too great a burden.' The judge agreed. The charges are not refuted, nevertheless Seelig is to receive £400,000 in legal costs. Even while facing charges and awaiting trial, Seelig was receiving commissions of £1m for arranging Ratners' purchase of the Next jewellery chain.

14 February 1992 Barbara Mills QC, Director of the Special Fraud Office, announces that charges against Seelig's co-defendant Lord Spens should be dropped. They were 'of a lesser gravity than that of those who took centre-stage... It could be regarded as unfair to proceed to a second trial at which Mr Seelig was absent'. She asks Attorney General Sir Patrick Mayhew to end the case against Seelig and Spens because it would not be in 'the public interest' to continue. The prosecution drops its case; it cannot be re-opened. Barbara Mills QC replaces Sir Allan 'kerb-crawler' Green as Director of Public Prosecutions.

14 February 1992 In the Guinness III trial the prosecution declares that the case against Cazenove partner David Mayhew is unlikely to win. Cazenove is one of Britain's most reputable stockbrokers and along with Morgan Grenfell organised the Guinness bid for Distillers. 'Fresh evidence' had been unearthed, though what it consisted of was not revealed: case dropped. Mayhew had been charged, together with Seelig, under the Prevention of Fraud Investments Act and the Companies Act.

Four of the Guinness defendants benefited from claims of ill health: ex-Sir Jack Lyons, Saunders, Seelig and Spens. What a contrast with the barbarity shown Giuseppe Conlon of the Maguire 7 who was denied treatment and died in captivity before be-

ing exonerated. Dropping the charges against Seelig because he might do something 'irrevocable' is also extraordinary. Ordinary prisoners who threaten suicide are either left to get on with it or locked up 'for their own protection'.

Saunders, Seelig and Co made fortunes for major City companies and banks. Regardless of how it was obtained, none of it will ever be paid back. Consequently, the principles of universality and equality before the law, so sacred to English constitutionalists, are suspended in this case.

Blue Arrow

The 1986 'Big Bang' in the City allowed the major banks to buy up brokers' and jobbers' firms and thereby deal directly in share issues and share-trading. They created new subsidiaries able to draw on vast sums from their parent companies. Three of them, County NatWest, NatWest Investment Bank and UBS Phillips Drew were employed by Blue Arrow employment group to orchestrate a £1.3bn takeover of the US company, Manpower. The bid would be funded by a special Blue Arrow new share issue aimed at raising £837m, at the time a record for its kind.

28 September 1987 With the champagne party waiting, the orchestrators learned that only 38 per cent of the share issue had been taken up. Disaster! If news leaked out Blue Arrow stock would plummet. They worked out a scheme: friendly buyers would be found for the unsold shares, and any left over would be 'warehoused', using the vast reserves available to County NatWest and UBS Phillips and Drew, and then dribbled gently into the market so that no one would be any the wiser about what had happened. But they were.

19 October 'Black Monday' £44bn was wiped off the London Stock Exchange in a single day. By 4 November, £146.6bn had been erased from London share prices and County NatWest, the Swiss UBS Phillips and Drew and their parent companies were left holding the Blue Arrow baby. The secret deal filtered out into the open: charges of conspiracy to defraud the Stock Exchange were laid.

October 1990 Preparatory hearings with judge and lawyers begin in October 1990. Cases against the three corporate defendants - NatWest Investment Bank, County NatWest and UBS Phillips and Drew - were dropped. A handful of individual merchant bankers were left to carry the can, as if an £837m decision would

not require corporate authority at the highest level. Accusations that National Westminster Bank's top management had conspired with the Bank of England to hush up the scandal were ignored.

Of 10 defendants, four were found guilty. Their guilt consisted not in buying up the shares themselves, but in not informing the Stock Exchange and the public. They were given suspended sentences, not fined a penny and £30m costs were awarded to the defendants. The young 'Masters of the Universe' are back, deal-making and hardly penitent.

Barlow Clowes

Discovered amongst the corporate wreckage in the twilight of the Thatcher years was the securities firm Barlow Clowes. Run by Peter Clowes, the firm ostensibly bought government gilts with guaranteed capital values and guaranteed fixed interest payments for small-time investors.

May 1988 Barlow Clowes collapsed, its books showing holdings of just £1.9m in gilts out of an expected £115m. Some 18,000 (mainly elderly) investors had entrusted £225m to Peter Clowes: where had it gone?

Between 1975-81 Barlow Clowes had operated without a licence, following an 'oversight' by the Department of Trade and Industry. In 1985 the licence was granted despite 'bond-washing' - a Barlow Clowes speciality - being outlawed in that year's Budget. 'Bond-washing' is a tax avoidance operation involving buying government bills just after interest has been paid on them and selling them just before the new dividend is due. From such trade Peter Clowes built up a network of offshore companies around the globe and whisked securities through them before they could be registered in Britain, again avoiding tax, and converting them into different asset forms, partly to avoid detection, partly to earn higher interest, but mainly to pocket the money himself.

In the world of billionaires and millionaires, Peter Clowes may have been a small player and that was his undoing, but he acquired the habits and peccadilloes of giants like Maxwell. Tens of millions of pounds were siphoned out of clients' accounts into houses, a chateau with vineyard, luxury cars, a Lear jet, Christina Onassis' yacht, a Hatten Garden jewellery company... baubles, bangles and assorted bright shiny beads.

February 1992 Peter Clowes was found guilty on eight charges of fraud and ten of theft totalling at least £13.2m. He was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. He worked for no merchant bank, no blue-chip City company, no reputable firm of brokers. From behind bars he might contemplate that if you are going to steal, don't just steal millions: steal hundreds of millions.

The Thatcher years were Golden Years for plunder and corruption. The following are just some of the scandals that surfaced in the City: combined they amount to tens of billions of pounds sifted away into a handful of pockets:

- Johnson Matthey Banker
- Ferranti International and ISC of South Africa
- Rover
- Harrods and Al Fayed's
- Midland Bank
- Westland Helicopters
- Guinness
- National Westminster Bank
- Lloyd's Insurance Market
- Maxwell and the Mirror
- BCCI
- Blue Arrow
- Brent Walker
- Polly Peck
- Barlow Clowes
- and on and on and on...